

BACKDRAFT

Revisions by
Greg Widen

Imagine Films
Trilogy Entertainment Group
March 22, 1990

Darkness.

Then the GLINT of a flashlight.

Its beam rocks crazily to and fro across the inside of a small storage room as we hear two children arguing.

OLDER KID

You're doing it wrong.

YOUNGER KID

Shut up.

OLDER KID

You're doing it wrong.

It's hard, but we get a sense of the room in the whipping beam of light. Huge, dark coats lined up like sides of beef on steel batons. Bent, stained helmets hung like African masks, alive in the dancing shadows.

Beneath them BRIAN, 6, and STEPHEN, 10, are trying to struggle into a pair of the ludicrously massive coats over their pajamas. Two lanky American brothers, scrapping away. The disagreement is over how Brian is attempting to fasten his with fingers dwarfish for the task.

STEPHEN

It doesn't go like that.

BRIAN

Who asked you?

STEPHEN

If you do it like that it'll open in the fire. Then you'll get burned and DIE.

The door suddenly opens, morning sunlight roaring in. It's a fire station storage room full of fire gear. A fireman stands in the doorway, tall, athletic, their father; DONALD McCAFFREY.

DONALD

Who's going to die?

STEPHEN

Brian. He's not doing it right, dad.
He never does it right.

DONALD

C'mon Stevie, you've been coming here for years, this is your brother's first sleep-over. Cut him some slack.

(gestures for them to come out)
Well, let's have a look.

The two boys tromp out of the closet. The rubber turn-out boots are as high as their thighs. The ends of the coats drag on the floor. They salute, Brian's arm just an empty sleeve.

DONALD

Very impressive.

Donald kneels down to straighten Brian's coat.

BRIAN

I'm going to be a fireman when I grow up, right, Dad?

STEPHEN

Ha!

DONALD

Well, if you don't, you'll be the first McCaffrey since the potato famine not to.

He re-fastens Brian's coat.

DONALD

Your brother's right. If you don't fasten these correctly they could open and you'd get burned.

STEPHEN

And DIE!

BRIAN

You wouldn't let me die, would you, Dad?

DONALD

McCaffreys are smarter than fire, Brian.

He slaps his sons playfully on the shoulders, pulling them together.

DONALD

How 'bout lunch, huh?

STEPHEN

Fireman shit?

DONALD

Hey, what's with the mouth? Where'd you grow up, a barn?

STEPHEN

Firehouse.

DONALD

Cute.

--The station suddenly fills with the BELLOW of an ALARM KLAXON.

DONALD (sighs)
Never fails...

A young fireman, ADCOX, comes around the corner with the dispatch card.

DONALD
Big deal?

ADCOX
Medium deal. A little smoke showing.

DONALD
Want to come along, Brian? Watch the old man
earn his keep?

STEPHEN
(pissed)
Dad!

DONALD
You've come along a dozen times, Stephen,
give your brother a chance. We'll be back
in a few minutes.
(to Adcox)
What do you think, take along a mascot this
time?

ADCOX
You're the Cap.

DONALD
(to Brian)
How 'bout it, sport?

BRIAN
(excited)
Sure!

Donald scoops Brian up, coat 'n all, and loads him into the fire engine cab.

DONALD
Then climb aboard, young sir, and sail with us
once again into danger's breech.

The other three firemen climb aboard and take their places.
There's a cough of diesel, a crunch of gears, and the engine is
pulling out of the station.

ADCOX
(to Brian)
Hit the button, kid.

Brian stamps his foot on the siren button. The red light snaps on, the siren growls and blares, and they're off down the street. Brian turns around in his seat and, at the last instant before the corner, makes eye contact with his older brother.

They stick their tongues out.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

The engine howls its way through the city. Brian, sandwiched between his father and Adcox, looks out in wonderment at intersections zipping past like picket fences, at people on sidewalks holding hands over their ears, at the red emergency lights bouncing crazily off shop windows. Talking is impossible, so Donald just musses his son's hair. Beams with pride.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

Lazy smoke curls out the second story of a commercial block. The engine pulls up and the firemen are jumping off like ship rats. Donald opens his door, jumps down, and pauses just long enough to point a serious finger at his son.

DONALD

Stay put.

He smiles and is off, dragging a hoseline with his crew toward the door.

Brian obeys his father --for about two seconds. He climbs down from the cab.

ENGINEER

Don't stray too far, little man.

Brian smiles to the pumper operator. He just wants a better look. And he gets it: Smoke turned evil and dark now, taking on purpose, rolling with vigor and hate.

His father's crew has the door open. It's dark and faraway inside and they disappear the instant they enter its world.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

There's a level of apartments above the storefronts. As Brian watches, a window opens and out steps his father and Adcox onto a small fire escape. Their attention's on the next window over, out of reach, wrapped in leaky smoke.

Suddenly Donald climbs up onto the fire escape's railing, armed with only an axe, and JUMPS across to the next metal balcony. A ballsy, dangerous move. He kicks in the window, breaks out the frame with his axe, and dives in.

A beat later he reemerges on the balcony with a terrified, smudged little girl. He hands the little girl over the railing to a fireman now coming up the more traditional way --a ladder.

Donald's face lifts and grins at Brian; dirty, bigger than life, invincible. He winks a wink only possible between fathers and sons and he's gone again, back into the swirling darkness.

As Brian stands there, full of love, full of pride, he sees a piece of awning crack, then pop; releasing a sickly yellow tongue of flame that slinks over the roof. The flame seems to pause, to stare at Brian a beat. Shhh, don't tell anyone. Brian is transfixed by it, his little head staring up in astonishment.

He begins to walk forward.

And suddenly everything is happening very fast in slow motion:

--Inside the building, Adcox comes to a door. Goes to open it as

--Brian steps slowly forward, under the power of a flame that beckons him, whispers to him and--

--Donald suddenly THROWS his body against Adcox, knocking him clear just as a flame EXPLODES DOWNWARD from the ceiling fully against him and--

--All the building's windows BLOW OUT and it's like the sky's erupted for Brian, a burning hailstorm that falls and pelts the ground around him. Plaster, wood, and something metal that cracks against the pavement and spins slowly.

A fire helmet.

And Adcox is coming out the door now, blackened and torn.

ADCOX

Get us some backup! We need some
Goddam backup!

And, spotting Brian, he runs towards him.

And the helmet spins and spins and Adcox keeps running, and the sky is raining fire, and when the helmet finally stops spinning, we read the printing on the neck guard.

--MCCAFFREY.

And Adcox has his arms around the boy, protecting him from the fire, the world, but it's like Brian doesn't see him. He pulls away from Adcox, walks up to the helmet, his father's helmet,

And puts it on.

ROLL TITLES

DISSOLVE SLOWLY TO:

Darkness

and a sound. Building. Coming closer. Like air rushing.
The sound grows louder and louder till--

--The darkness suddenly ERUPTS in a BELCHING TONGUE OF FLAME that skids across the ceiling, buffeting clouds of heavy, liquid smoke. The darkness has become a room that has become a choking, searing hell. And into hell,

Crawls a fireman.

On his hands and knees, searching the murky floor in wide sweeps. In dark corners. Under furniture. Looking for something. Someone.

He checks the ceiling. The flames rolling faster and faster across it. Thirty seconds. Max. He turns back to his search when

--WHOOSH! The doorway behind him EXPLODES top to bottom in flame. He looks frantically for another way out. There isn't one.

The fire's whipped itself into a frenzy, PUMPING blazing cinders into a wild CYCLONE. It's manic. Animal. The fireman pushes his face to the floor, sucking desperately for a clean gulp of air beneath the whirling clouds of vicious smoke.

Oh Jesus, help me. I've fucked up. Fucked up bad.

The fire ROARS down both walls. He's trapped in a cremation oven, gagging and whimpering helplessly as the fire HOWLS in victory, PUSHING down and down on him till--
--WUMP.

The entire fire suddenly, instantaneously, SHUTS OFF.

A PAIR OF BOOTS

Enter the smoldering doorway. Walk up to the fireman curled up on the floor.

BOOTS

You're dead, McCaffrey.

Brian McCaffrey, now 27, rolls onto his back. Boy grown into man. Black Irish and his father's disarming smile.

BRIAN

Shit.

BOOTS

You're wanted upstairs.

Now?

BRIAN

Now.

BOOTS

CUT TO:

THE CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING ACADEMY

Sweat and tradition. Several dozen exhausted candidates are driven through the paces of climbing ladders, rappelling down the sides of buildings, and running up staircases with hose rolls on their backs.

INT. ACADEMY HALLWAY

Brian, still in his smoldering fire coat, walks up to a door marked ACADEMY COMMANDER--J. FITZGERALD and knocks. From within:

Enter.

FITZGERALD (o.s.)

INT. FITZGERALD'S OFFICE

Seated at his desk is the head of the academy, FITZGERALD. A well-worn sixty-year-old, he casts a steely gaze at Brian.

BRIAN

Candidate McCaffrey, sir.

FITZGERALD

Have a seat, McCaffrey.

He does. Brian takes off his partially melted helmet and sets it down on the desk. The helmet continues to smolder.

FITZGERALD

Your class has just about finished its rotation, hasn't it?

BRIAN

Finals are Friday, sir.

Fitzgerald's thumbing through a file.

FITZGERALD

We've been down this road before, haven't we, Brian? How long's it been? Six, seven years?

He closes the file and meets Brian's eye.

FITZGERALD

Do you know why we let you come back here?

BRIAN

My qualifications, sir. I understand how this must have been an inconvenience and I'm very grateful for the opportunity, sir.

FITZGERALD

A fire department is nothing if not tradition. And one tradition we hold very dear is that the sons of firemen, especially the sons of dead fireman, and absolutely the sons of dead hero firemen, all get their shot at this place. You got your shot, Brian, and you walked away from it. One week to graduation. Kissed off this place, your family, everything.

BRIAN

I came back, sir.

FITZGERALD

Why, Brian?

BRIAN

To contribute something, sir.

Fitzgerald stands, walks to the window, looks out on the muffled drill calls of future firefighters.

FITZGERALD

I knew your father--

BRIAN

--I didn't.

Fitzgerald turns away from the window. Appraises Brian.

FITZGERALD

We've let other candidates drop out and come back. People get sick, family members die, we're not inhuman here. But six years? without a word to anyone? When I saw your application pass this desk again I almost laughed. Almost.

BRIAN

Is there a point to this, sir?

FITZGERALD

Yeah. I don't buy it, this sudden transformation into selfless civic contributor. I let you back in 'cause that's the way we do things. Dead hero father rule. And to be honest I didn't think you'd get this far. But here we are, four days to graduation, and you're still around.

BRIAN

I'll be here four days after, too. Sir.

FITZGERALD

That's what I'm worried about.

(holds up file)

Because you know what I see in here? I see a guy that can pass the tests, at the numbers right, but between the lines I see a kid who hangs back. I see a kid who's been doing odd jobs the last six years, half finished projects.

(beat)

I see a kid that's just looking for a place to hide awhile and willing to use the name of a dead father to do it.

Brian's polite exterior holds, his face impassive.

BRIAN

Is that why I'm up here, sir? For you to call me names?

FITZGERALD

You're up here to be reminded that it doesn't matter what a candidate's score downstairs is, nobody passes through this place without my personal signature.

(beat)

I want you to quit, Brian.

BRIAN

No, sir. Sorry.

FITZGERALD

I can just fire you. Don't kid yourself.

BRIAN

No you can't or you would have. Dead hero father rule. Sir.

The two stare at one another. Brian finally stands.

BRIAN

Anything else, sir? I'm late for class.

FITZGERALD

You certainly inherited your father's balls.

(beat, softer)

It's too bad you didn't inherit his heart.

BRIAN

You don't know about my heart, sir.

He turns to leave.

FITZGERALD
Candidate McCaffrey--
(Brian turns)
This isn't over yet. You may graduate but you
still have a year as a probationary fireman.
And that's hard duty, son. Unless you really
love this job it'll eat you up. Or kill you.

Fitzgerald's face softens into almost sympathy.

FITZGERALD
There's easier places to hide, Brian.

BRIAN
Thanks for the advice, sir.

INT. HALL

As Brian walks down the corridor he passes another fire
candidate, TIM, 20, bright-eyed and enthusiastic.

TIM
Well?

BRIAN
Just wanted to welcome me into
the family.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ACADEMY QUAD - DAY

The graduation ceremony. Glistening sunlight beams down on brand
new Chicago firefighters in dress uniforms.
Fitzgerald stands at the podium.

FITZGERALD
Some things in our department never change;
Courage, devotion, and honor in what we do.
And though the world may spin faster than
most would like, and though this department
may be under pressure with manpower cuts and
budget priorities, it is with only optimism
and deep pleasure that I stand before you
today and happily certify that Candidate
Class number 322, having successfully completed
all academy requirements, are hereby
graduated to the Chicago City Fire Department.

Candidates and their relatives CHEER and leap to their feet.
Fitzgerald's gaze sails over the eager faces and brushes up
against Brian's. The two exchange brief looks.

FITZGERALD

As is traditional at these ceremonies,
we'll now have a few words from deputy
mayor Martin Swayzak.

The applause stops dead to just a few trickles. Swayzak steps up to the podium in total silence, feeling the hate of the crowd, of Fitzgerald and the other brass beside him. He's a tough son of a bitch though in civilian coat 'n tie, and his reaction is only a thin smile.

SWAYZAK

Nice to see you too...

INT. PUB

From the guts of an old firehouse has been built a fireman's pub; complete with brass pole, mounted axes, personalized T-shirts from various engine companies proudly declaring "LADDER CO. 27 --AXE FIRST, HOSE LATER" and "CHICAGO FD, 150 YEARS OF TRADITION UNIMPEDED BY PROGRESS".

Tonight the place is firmly in the hands of an army of recently graduated candidates, still in their uniforms, blowing off weeks of compressed steam; drinking, dancing and throwing up together. Two girls dance go-go style as one of the candidates soaks them down with a hose line.

Brian, Tim and a few other candidates enter from the street. Well oiled from previous stops along the way, hair and demeanor are thoroughly mussed and ties are permanently AWOL. They survey the scene.

BRIAN

Completely out of control.

TIM

Disgusting.

BRIAN

What the hell are we waiting for?

They wade into the melee. Shoulder up to the bar.

BRIAN

Barkeep! Three of your most lethal!

The barkeep turns around, his eyes full of surprise.

BARKEEP

Well I'll be the son of a whore, it's young Brian McCaffrey.

BRIAN

You are the son of a whore, Willy.

BARKEEP

Still as charming as ever, I see. Been a few years, pup. Off conquering the world last I heard. How'd it go?

BRIAN

Somebody beat me to it.

BARKEEP

They have a way of doing that. And what is this I see? Do my eyes deceive? Is that a fire department uniform on your body? Oceans will be boiling tomorrow.

BRIAN

Yeah, well, you can only fight family history so long.

BARKEEP

Please!

BRIAN

It's for real, Willy. I've changed my life.

BARKEEP

I love you dearly, young Brian, but I'm not buying today. If you're in that uniform then there's gotta be a scam going along with it.

Three gargle blasters appear on the bar.

BARKEEP

(to Tim and Candidate)

I assume you two have ID.

Their faces blanche. The barkeep laughs.

BARKEEP

Naive little pups, aren't they?

BRIAN

Drink up, kids. You're firemen now.

BARKEEP

And you?

BRIAN (throwaway)

We'll see...

Down the hatch. Coughs. Gags. Wonderful.
Brian surveys the female possibilities.

BRIAN

So what's the score, Willy?

BARKEEP

There are a few lovely college lab techs of
dubious character in yonder corner.

BRIAN

'Enuf said.

(to Tim)

Excuse me, gents.

Brian pushes off in their direction.

BARKEEP

Oh, and if any of them asks to
clone your RNA, say no.

Brian slides up to one, well into a very large drink.

BRIAN

Greetings.

GIRL TECH

I'm Betty. PhD. Twice.

BRIAN

Brian. College drop-out. Once.

Betty luxuriously stretches a tank top with plenty of backpressure.

BETTY

I'm a biologist.

BRIAN

Clearly.

BETTY

(looking at his uniform)

You're a fireman?

BRIAN

Why Betty, you are a PhD.

BETTY

(takes his hand)

Come here, Brian.

She leads him out through a door out into

AN ALLEY

Where she runs a hand sexily up and down the lapel of his coat.

BETTY

You know what I would like to do, Brian?
Right now?

She pulls his ear to her lips and purrs thickly.

BETTY

I want to clone your RNA.

She presses him against the wall and takes out a strange device from her back pocket.

BETTY

You're gonna like this. Really.

BRIAN

Uh, Betty...

Wham! Tim and his buddies burst into the alley with the fire hose.

TIM

Yee ha!

WOOSH! They hit Brian and Betty with a wall of water, BLOWING them off their feet and SKIDDING them into the trashcans. Tim giggles and shuts down the hose.

TIM

Don't want you overheating, Brian!

BRIAN

You son of a--

Brian jumps to his feet and charges Tim.

INT. PUB

Brian and Tim hurtle in through the door. They go down, the momentum sliding them across the floor. They rough it up, laughing, till Brian finally pins Tim and stands triumphantly.

BRIAN

That'll teach you to mess with your elders.

When Brian looks up, he realizes he's face-to-face with a glass case. He sobers suddenly. Its shelves are full of fire helmets. Used, stained and broken ones, set reverently on velvet. There's a photo of each helmet's owner framed behind it. It's a place of honor. Of martyrs.

TIM

Kinda brings you up short, doesn't it?

Tim's climbed to his feet. It has the same effect on him.

BRIAN
(faraway)

Yeah...

TIM
Man, that could be any one of us.

And there it is. Brian's father's helmet. Brian's father smiling in a photo. Confident. Top of the world.

BRIAN
Not me.

TIM
Yeah? You got a special line on fate?

BRIAN
Just a way to bend the odds.

TIM
We're only probies, man. We go where they send us.

BRIAN
Well, that sorta depends.

TIM
What are you getting at, McCaffrey?
Brian tears his eyes from the case. Grins deviously.

BRIAN
Wanna see where you're gonna work?

TIM
You're crazy. Station assignments are sealed till next week.

BRIAN
Follow me.
(Tim's blank look)
C'mon...

As they head out of the bar

CUT TO:

A Porsche cutting through darkened streets. The DRIVER, 50s, is dressed for success in expensive coat and tie. Pulling up to his trendy brown stone, he gets out and rubs his eyes. Another day in the salt mines.

Climbing the short stairs, he sticks his key into the lock and opens the door. It is the last thing he will ever do.

A THUNDERING EXPLOSION BLOWS out the doorway and ENGULFS the stoop in a ROARING FIREBALL as we

CUT BACK TO:

Brian leading Tim out of the bar and down the sidewalk. It's cold out and they're both soaked to the skin.

TIM

Jesus, we're gonna die of pneumonia before a fire ever gets to us. Where the hell are you going?

BRIAN

Patience, Scarlett.

Just a few more yards and there it is across the street. A fire station. Not just any station. This one is brand-spanking new. It positively gleams.

TIM

Huh?

They cross the street. The apparatus doors are up and they duck their heads in for a look. It's huge, with half a dozen pieces of equipment crowded on the floor. There's an extremely modern computer center behind glass, a racquetball court, probably cinnamon in the coffee if you looked closely enough. Tim lets out a low whistle.

BRIAN

Nice, eh? Bet you'd like to work here, right?

TIM

Fat chance.

BRIAN

I already am.

TIM

You're full of shit.

(Brian's serious)

How?

BRIAN

A dead hero father connection in assignments. That and a case of scotch.

TIM

You crooked son of a bitch.

BRIAN

You're working here too. The buddy system.

TIM
 You're amazing...
 (stares at building)
 God, it's beautiful.

BRIAN
 More importantly it's also safe.

TIM
 What do you mean, "safe"?

BRIAN
 There's never fires in this district.
 It's all glass high-rise with sprinkler
 systems. This is just a show station. The
 worst you get here is back-up on someone
 else's fire---by the time you arrive
 the first-in smoke eaters have already
 done the hard stuff.

(grins)
 Couple of years here, then we transfer to
 administration and start climbing the
 company ladder. All without our helmets
 coming anywhere near a glass case.

Tim gazes out over the modern equipment, shiny walls.

TIM
 You know, these new stations are part of how
 Commissioner Swayzak's wrecking this depart-
 ment. For every one of these Disneylands he
 builds they close three old firehouses. He's
 cutting manpower and spreading us further and
 further apart from each other. People are
 getting hurt.

BRIAN
 All the more reason to work here.

TIM
 Yeah, I guess. But is that why we joined?
 I thought the point was to save lives.

BRIAN
 Right. Starting with our own.

TIM
 I mean, isn't that why we became firemen?
 To fight fires?

BRIAN
 Maybe you did.

Just then there's a loud squawk of voices over the station's
 radio. Other units screaming to a fire.

TIM

Hey, it's my cousin's unit.

Distorted voices. "Passing State Street intersection..."

TIM

That's just down the way from here.

Brian takes a long, studied drink from his beer and hook-shots it perfectly into a trash bin.

BRIAN

Then let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Brian and Tim jump into Brian's car, an old BMW. They shoot blindly down the street looking for the fire engine, running down red lights or anything else that gets in their way. Brian suddenly hits the brakes, SCREECHING to a stop. They roll down their windows. Far off can be heard the wind-up of a siren.

TIM

(points)

That way.

SCREECH.

They fly around a corner, down a block, and there it is, lights flashing up ahead. Brian GUNS it, roars up alongside the fire engine. Tim leans out the window, shakes a bottle of beer, and lets loose a foamy eruption on the truck's driver.

DRIVER

Tim! You crazy motherfucker!

But he's laughing.

TIM

What'cha got?

DRIVER

Box alarm. South Woodlawn.

TIM

We'll meet ya.

EXT. SOUTH WOODLAWN - NIGHT

As Brian and Tim pull up two engine companies are already dragging lines up to the totally involved brownstone we saw explode earlier. They get out, Tim cheering the firemen on like a drive-in movie.

Brian watches the fire with uneasy fascination. Flames erupting through an upper floor window, embers whipping into the night. Small cinders, glowing snowflakes, drifting to the ground around him. It's like that day, years ago. A flame that could be that same flame, racing and pillaging with mad glee, yet taking the time to exchange looks with Brian. I never forget a face, kid.

One of the engine companies is entering the doorway now. And as he watches them willingly crawl into a place any sane person would run for their life from, it fully and truly hits him. This is the job I signed up for. This is what I'm supposed to do for a living. He turns away--

--And notices with a shock the CHARRED CORPSE of the Porsche driver. Its legs sticking out at crazy angles, the body is stuffed head-first through the windshield of a parked car. Brian looks from the car to the burning brownstone. It's twenty-five yards away.

TIM

(also looking at body)

Shit. Backdraft, man. Knock you into the next county if you're not looking for it.

The brownstone fire quickly retreats, transforming itself into noisy clouds of dirty white steam. And one of the firemen is coming back out now, walking toward Brian.

When he's just a few yards away he pulls off his air mask and helmet and we shudder with Brian, because the man is a dead ringer for HIS FATHER.

STEPHEN

(ice cold)

Well, look what we have here. Nice costume. Rent it?

BRIAN

I want to thank you for coming to my graduation, Stephen. And for setting up that wonderful little chat I had with Fitzgerald. It was a great inspiration to me.

Stephen pats Brian's cheeks with something less than affection, leaving behind large charcoal smears.

STEPHEN

(re smears)

Doesn't work on you.

Stephen turns and leaves.

BRIAN
(calling after him)
What the hell do you want from me.

STEPHEN
I gave up wanting shit from you a long time ago. Now I just want you to go your own way, Brian.

BRIAN
I am.

STEPHEN
Not in that uniform. That's dad's way and my way, and we don't want your company.

BRIAN
Oh, dad told you that, huh? Where? In a fucking seance?

STEPHEN
Dad was proud of that uniform and so am I. You're just hiding in it. Things didn't work out in the big bad world? Hell, I'll just go back to Chicago. The Academy's gotta take me, I'm a McCaffrey, I'm a goddamn legacy. Getting warm, Brian?

(Brian doesn't answer)
See ya around, little brother.

BRIAN
Not likely.

STEPHEN
(turns)
Oh yeah, almost forgot. Talked to Fitzgerald yesterday. We decided that what you needed was brotherly love and assistance during your probationary year, to help you through those trying first months. So he made a change. Starting tomorrow, you're assigned to my company.

Brian's color drops a hue. Stephen smiles.

STEPHEN
One case of scotch? You're getting cheap in your old age, Brian...

And he turns for his own men, leaving Brian there alone, clouds of smoke drifting past like ghosts.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

DISSOLVE TO:

A simple one-room walk-up. A stereo blares. Brian paces, tucking in his uniform shirt, sits down at the table and finishes his coffee.

Laying beside the mug is a fireman's hinged spanner-wrench. Brian picks it up. Snaps it open one-handed. Rolls it over the back of his palm. Pops it into the air and... drops it.

Shit.

BRIAN

He tries the routine again. This time he catches it with one finger like a six-gun. He's good with it.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Brian climbs into his car, turns the key --nothing. He gets out, looks under the hood, then SLAMS it down in frustration.

INT. ELEVATED TRAIN - MORNING

CUT TO:

A pissed-off Chicago, hauling itself off to work in the morning snap, passes by Brian's window. Tough Midwestern brick. Tough Midwesterners. Heads-down in their 150 year war with a wind committed to pushing the whole damn thing into Lake Michigan.

EXT. EL STATION - MORNING

The train clacking away above him, Brian walks down the sidewalk, turns a corner, and comes on

THE FIRE STATION

Turn of the century abused. Sooty with stone gargoyles and a pair of faded red doors that suddenly CRANK OPEN as Brian comes up the drive. A fire engine and ladder truck, lights flashing, pull out onto the apron.

The fireman sticking his head out of the passenger window is Stephen. One look at the silver trumpets on his collar and we know this isn't Fireman McCaffrey but Fire CAPTAIN McCaffrey.

STEPHEN

You're too late.

The engine begins heading down the street.

BRIAN

Hey!

The fireman in the back of the truck reaches out a hand.

FIREMAN (shouting)
C'mon, get on.

Brian leaps aboard as they hit the siren and take off. The man that helped Brian up is Adcox, who we remember from the film's first scene. He's twenty years older now, a veteran firefighter. He squeezes Brian's shoulder affectionately.

ADCOX
(warm)
Hey, baby McCaffrey, how ya doin', man?

BRIAN
All right. Good to see you, John.

Brian shouts over the siren to KRIZMINSKI, 35, one more seat down.

BRIAN
I'm Brian.

KRIZMINSKI
I'm sorry.

EXT. - DAY

A five story factory is going like hell as the pumper and ladder company pull up. Stephen and Adcox drag hose as Brian rushes to a compartment and begins strapping on an air tank and mask. He's so jacked up he can't get it on right.

The pumper engineer, GRINDLE, late 20s and hasn't taken off his sunglasses since 1979, calmly helps Brian into his gear.

GRINDLE
It's only rock 'n roll, kid.

Stephen, Adcox and Krizminski are crouched at the door, ready to go.

STEPHEN
Hey, probie! How 'bout it, huh?

Brian runs up and takes his position on the hose line. Stephen reaches over and changes the way Brian has his coat buckled.

STEPHEN
You're doing it wrong.

Stephen eases the door open. Thick smoke rolls sickly out over their heads. A nod from him and in they go.

INT. BURNING BUILDING - DAY

Inside the smoke is like liquid lead. Going by feel, they hump the hose up one staircase after another, crawling on their hands and knees toward a dull red glow. Turning a corner, they enter

A VAST ROOM

Totally ablaze. Brian looks up in wonder at the buffeting waves of flame in the ceiling, at the SCREECHING timbers crumbling to the white-hot floor. At the walls HOWLING in bestial agony. It is the most horrifying, and wonderful, thing he has ever seen.

Adcox opens up the nozzle, turning loose a high pressure BLAST OF WATER into the ceiling. The fire SCREAMS in manic anger and HEAVES a cloud of HOWLING steam that WHIRLS back and BAKES them like lobsters. Brian gasps for air as swirling ash batters his facemask. A window somewhere EXPLODES. Somebody shouts. Christ, you can't see anything.

STEPHEN

Let's go!

The chase is on! Going for the throat while the fire's confused and defensive, the firemen SCRAMBLE through the boiling cloud. They hit it in the ceiling, in the walls, forcing it back and back. It HOWLS and CLAWS in anger, furiously throwing cinders and broken timbers in their faces. The walls ECHO with its SCREAMS as it CRASHES in retreat to the next room.

The blackened walls around them HISS and POP in its wake. Crouched at the door of the next room, the next battle, they hunker down for a breath.

BRIAN

Don't you think we're getting a little close to this thing?

STEPHEN

Scared, probie?

BRIAN

Fuck you. Captain.

STEPHEN

You're in the busiest, toughest company in the city now, boy. Go with it or go away.
(to others)

C'mon! Let's get the son of a bitch!

And in they go...

Meanwhile...

ON THE BUILDING'S OTHER SIDE

Tim's ladder company, the fire department's shock troops, CRASH through a window and begin HACKING their way through walls with axes.

BRIAN'S COMPANY

Are working the fire gingerly, trapped now like a wounded animal in a dead-end room. It's grown weary and slow under the clouds of steam. Brian's huddled at the end of the line, two bodies between him and the fire.

STEPHEN

Brian! Up front!

BRIAN

Jesus...

Brian crawls up and is handed the hose nozzle.

STEPHEN

No! Less water! Too much and the steam'll-clear and the fire'll flash on us.

Brian obeys, but the fire's had enough of this shit and is waking up. Getting meaner.

ADCOX

We're losing it, Stevie. It's gonna flash.

STEPHEN

No, we can still get it. Just go easy, Brian. Keep it sleepy. Don't let the bastard sneak out on us.

KRIZMINSKI

Jesus Christ, let's get out of here...

Just then Tim's ladder company SHATTERS through the far door and SPRAYS the fire. The sudden thermal upset FLASHES the fire gases, IGNITING THE ROOM'S AIR. Stephen PUSHES Brian to the floor as the fire BLOWS over their heads, BURSTING their coats and helmets INTO FLAME.

The intruding company HITS them with water, then CRASHES right on through after the fire.

A Ladderman steps on Brian's back.

BRIAN

Hey!

LADDERMAN

Sorry man, I thought you were dead.

Brian, stunned, sits up, his coat and helmet smoking. Stephen seems totally unaffected and is already on his feet grinning.

STEPHEN

Okay. So I was wrong.

And everybody's on their feet again, backing up the ladder company. Suddenly the flooring GIVES. One of the laddermen FALLS THROUGH, grabbing the edges at the last minute as flames BELLOW UP from underneath. He SCREAMS as his grip loosens.

Brian and Krizminski leap to the ladderman's side, grabbing his arms and coat.

LADDERMAN

Help...Oh God...

But the angle's bad. Blow it now and all three could take a header. Brian looks down into the yawning hell beneath them. Oh Jesus protect me.

The ladderman's panicking, losing his grip. Krizminski bores his eyes into the man's with the calm and conviction of Moses.

KRIZMINSKI

You go, we go.

They may all die, but they won't leave him. He calms a little, hangs on till Stephen and Adcox appear and PULL them all out of harm's way. The wounded fireman's legs are hideously burned. This is his last fire.

Brian looks down through the hole to the rolling, hysterical waves of flame beneath them.

---BOOM!---

It's a sudden, shattering vibration that shakes the building to its foundations. Then, a sucking sound: RUSH-RUSH-RUSH... Stephen speaks calmly into his radio handset.

STEPHEN

Is it?

RADIO VOICE

Yeah.

STEPHEN (to firemen)

Dig in!

The fire crews immediately gather in the center of the floor. They turn over tables, chairs, anything to form a barrier. A circling of the wagons.

---BOOM!---

-rush-rush-rush-

---BOOM!---

Each louder than the last.

Stephen and Brian are ducked behind an overturned desk. Stephen clutches the hoseline like a frontiersman's Winchester.

STEPHEN

You're gonna love this.

-rush-rush-rush-

---CRAAAASH!!

On an instant the world comes apart as all four walls of factory windows EXPLODE in a hail of glass. A wave of HOWLING FLAME POURS IN after it, SHRIEKING and HISSING. It rolls insanely across the floor; burning, consuming.

STEPHEN

Get it!

The firemen leap up from the barricade, opening fire with their hoseline. Water and flame crash, snarl, struggle across the floor in a blood curdling ROAR. It's a thrashing, murderous standoff. Then the fire blinks.

And Stephen's over the top of the barricade, the others backing him as he mercilessly drives it back, back, trapping it finally into a corner. The fire hisses, spits, shakes the walls with its furious anger. But it's all bluster now, the fire's dying.

Stephen shuts off the hose, walks up close, and whispers,

STEPHEN

You lose, asshole.

WHOOSH! --Stephen blasts it into nothingness.

LADDER COMPANY CAPTAIN

Stephen! BC's on the radio. Says they think a civilian got left behind upstairs.

STEPHEN

Adcox! Take Tim and Brian, do a search.

Brian looks pretty shaken up. Stephen helps him roughly to his feet.

STEPHEN

Don't fold on me now, man.

Adcox leads him and Tim upstairs and down a corridor. It's only the fire's ghost here, lazy and slow.

ADCOX

Don't wander, guys. Stay close to papa.

Off the corridor are rooms full of commercial sewing machines. Each fireman takes one. In the first office Brian drops to his knees. Looks under a table, flashes his light behind the couch. Nothing. All three meet back out in the corridor, empty handed.

ADCOX

--Shhhh.

It's then they hear it. Faint. "Help me..."

ADCOX

Okay! C'Mon!

Adcox and Tim take off toward it. Brian stumbles and drops his flashlight, picks it up, then goes to catch up when

--WHAM!--

A tongue of flame suddenly LEAPS out of an air shaft into the hall. Brian freezes, cut off from the other two. The fire's not too bad, he could probably just plow through it, but it's staring at him now, giggling and hissing. Just try it, kid. Brian backs off,

BRIAN

Fuck it.

And turns and runs the other way. He goes down the staircase, hits the landing... And realizes he's lost.

BRIAN

Oh shit...

The smoke's getting bad now, flames licking his heels. He blindly dashes down this hall and that, looking for a way out. When he sees it.

In a burning room behind some furniture. Something flesh-colored. Shit. He crawls up to the doorway. Yeah, it's a body. Shielding his face with a gloved hand, he jumps through the burning doorway and scrambles for the figure.

It's a woman. Adrenalin pounding the top of his skull off, he grabs her and jumps back through the doorway.

BRIAN

I got one!

Brian runs back down the corridor, cradling the body. The smoke lifts a second, he finds the way out--

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

-And now he's bursting from the building, shouting at the top of his lungs.

BRIAN

I got somebody! I got somebody!

A sea of media flashbulbs ERUPTS in his face. The press have arrived in force, crowding the street.

Brian pushes through them, steps over the tangles of hose to a clear spot on the far side of the engine. Two fire paramedics rush over as he lowers the figure onto the sidewalk.

BRIAN

Is she...Is she alive?

The paramedics suddenly stop their efforts. Turn to Brian.

PARAMEDIC

I'm afraid you're a little too late with this one.

They step aside. Brian looks down. The woman looks strange. Mostly because she's a heavy store DRESSING DUMMY. The paramedics burst into laughter. Fireman after fireman comes over to see what's going on and doubles over in hysterics.

Brian, looking pale and shaken, turns and walks away. He passes Adcox and Tim, sitting on the pumper's tailboard.

TIM

Hey guy, what happened up there?

BRIAN

I got lost.

ADCOX

Sorry to hear about the mannequin. I heard you two were close.

It's a good-natured rib but it sails right over Brian, who walks quickly into

AN ALLEY

Where he barfs his guts out in private. Doubled-over, one arm on the brick wall for support, we see the raw terror. The demons rushing out of him.

BRIAN

Fuck it fuck it fuck it...

Someone else does too.

A WOMAN

Dressed strangely, given the circumstances, in a long expensive coat, she's coming down the alley with a clipboard. This is JENNIFER WINSLOW, late 20s, a cold shock of beauty. Too far away to touch, close enough to burn if you stare too long.

Brian, ashes smeared across an ashen face, spittle on his chin, doesn't even look up as she passes without comment.

STEPHEN

(appearing beside him)

You all right?

Stephen isn't pale. He's flushed and buoyant. All this hasn't taken anything from him. It's made his day.

BRIAN

Yeah. Fine. I'm a little busy right now.

Stephen leans against the wall. Folds his arms.

STEPHEN

When are you going to stop this silliness, Brian? Huh? Jesus, look at you...

Brian spins on him.

BRIAN

I have just as much right to be here as you do, damn it.

STEPHEN

You had the right. But you gave it up, remember? The only reason you're here is to pick up a few easy paychecks till something better came along. Bet that 34,000 bucks a year starting and twenty days a month off looked good three months ago, didn't it? Well, people that come here with that attitude, looking for an easy way out, they end up killing someone, Brian. And I'm not going to let that happen, not in my department.

BRIAN

You don't know anything about me.

STEPHEN

I know you cold, Brian.

As Stephen walks away we see that Jennifer's been standing at the end of the alley, listening to the whole conversation.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

A chauffeured black sedan pulls up to the perimeter of the fire. Emerging from it is deputy mayor/fire commissioner Swayzak. Jennifer walks up.

JENNIFER
Morning, boss.

SWAYZAK
Jennifer. Any word on cause?

JENNIFER
Nobody's saying anything yet.

SWAYZAK
What a fucking surprise.

A couple of NEWSPAPERMEN appear beside the sedan.

REPORTER
Hey, Marty. Beautiful day, huh?

SWAYZAK
Always a pleasure, Roger.

REPORTER
Another fire in this end of town. Getting to be cinder alley up here.

SWAYZAK
You used that last week.

REPORTER
Probably use it next week too, way things are going. When are you finally going to announce if these are arson or not?

SWAYZAK
Our most experienced investigator is on the case. We expect a determination from him any time.

REPORTER
That's Rimgale, right?

REPORTER #2
(smiles)
"The Shadow".

SWAYZAK
(sotto to Jennifer)
Where the fuck is he?

THE FIRE

Seen now from across another street, has mostly died down, the black smoke turning puffy white.

A FLAME

Leaps up into the foreground. Touches a cigarette. The cigarette glows, lingers, then lowers slowly from the mouth of RIMGALÉ, fifty-five years old and six and a half feet of solid granite. Wearing a windbreaker and grey slacks tucked into fire department rubber boots, he takes another slow drag. Watches the building. He could have been standing there five minutes or five years. He drops the cigarette, crushes it with his boot, and walks without hurry across the street.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

The ladder company, lined-up with their pipe poles like a Roman legion, rip open the walls and beat the last weak flames in a final flurry of dingy sparks.

The moment the smoke clears just a fraction, cigarettes appear in everyone's mouth. Was it good for you? The talk is easy and obscene, the intense camaraderie of shared danger. Ash clods are thrown playfully back and forth in the afterglow of having taken on the worst there is and walking away one more time.

Brian wipes the crusty snot running from his nose and sticks his head through a blown window for an icy gulp of Chicago air. He coughs. It becomes a hack. He spits out a hideous, black glob of phlegm. The sight of it, the thought that it came from inside, sickens him.

FALSETTO VOICE

I love you, Brian. You're my superman...

Adcox has snuggled the female dressing dummy up to Brian's ear. Brian slaps it away.

ADCOX

Whoa, Bri, relax, man.

BRIAN

Sorry. I'm just a little tired of people in my face right now.

(re dummy)

At least this has a better personality than certain hot-head captains I know.

ADCOX

Stevie's a good fireman, Bri. The best maybe. Pushes people harder than any guy here. Working with him, you gotta run just to stand still. He's rough on you, but he's rough on everybody. It's just bad luck you're family.

CUT TO:

Brian rolling hose, following it back through room after room of steaming, watery crud.

It startles him when he first notices Rimgale standing silently in the doorway. Staring. A carved Sphynx. Looking at nothing. And everything. Brian turns the direction he's staring. It's all just burned-out, blistered walls to him. Unique only for its sameness.

BRIAN

Nothin' much left, huh?

Rimgale doesn't answer at first, his eyes following the blackened, steaming walls.

RIMGALE

Oh, it's still got a few secrets.

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

As Rimgale heads for his red fire department sedan, Swayzak is there, waiting for him. Jennifer stands nearby.

RIMGALE

Commissioner Swayzak.

SWAYZAK

Investigator Rimgale.

RIMGALE

I need to get in the trunk.

Swayzak's leaning on it. He steps aside. Rimgale pops it and fishes around inside.

SWAYZAK

We're all waiting on your fire report, Investigator. We've been waiting on it for weeks.

RIMGALE

Fire has its own schedule, commissioner. You'll have an answer as soon as I do.

SWAYZAK

Three major fires and one backdraft death in two months up here and you can't even tell me if they're linked? Christ, that lawyer..
(looks to Jennifer)

JENNIFER

--Alan Seagrave.

SWAYZAK

...Stuffed head-first into a fucking parked car. That was on the goddamn cover of every paper in town. People are demanding answers, Investigator, and I think you're holding out on me. I think you're purposefully dragging this out because of my firehouse program--

RIMGALE

--Firehouse closing program--

SWAYZAK

--To make me look bad for the election. I'm not going to put up with this petty shit, understand?

Rimgale finds the case he's looking for, pulls it out and shuts the trunk. He looks at the commissioner with the calm and inner peace of a monk.

RIMGALE

I have one job, Commissioner. To determine if a fire is accidental or arson. And if arson, to catch the torch who did it. I take that job dead serious and I don't stall or hurry it up for anyone. Even you. Now if there's nothing else, I have work to do.

And he walks back to the burned building.

SWAYZAK

Son of a bitch. How bad do we really need that report?

JENNIFER

Bad. If the verdict on these fires is arson, we're okay. All we have to do is catch the maniac and everything's back to normal. But if they're accidental, or if Rimgale's stalling so people will think they might be accidental, then voters in this district are going to start wondering why, in the middle of a fire problem, your task force is cutting their stations.

SWAYZAK

He's trying to make this a campaign issue.

JENNIFER

It is a campaign issue. That's why you did it in the first place, remember?

SWAYZAK

I wish I could fire the son of a bitch.

JENNIFER

It's tough to fire a legend.

EXT. FIRE STATION L7 - DAY

Brian jumps down from the rig as it backs up the driveway. Across the street a middle-aged woman flashes them from the balcony of her apartment.

ADCOX

That's Franny She likes firemen.

Brian walks into the apparatus area and pauses beside a small storage closet. It's the one he and Stephen played in as kids. This is his dad's station.

He stands there a moment. Memories. Then starts heading for the stairs, freezing suddenly at the sight of

A DOG

Sort of. It has the ribcage of a wildebeast, greasy black hair dragging behind it on the floor, and lumbers toward him emitting an earth rumbling GROWL

KRIZMINSKI

(in passing)

That's The Thing. You can't stay unless he likes you. Say hi.

He thinks they're kidding. But the moment he moves The Thing GROWLS threateningly.

BRIAN

...Hi. Nice haircut.

The firemen walk away, leaving him to the hideous creature. Brian wipes some of the crusted grime from his face, looks back and forth between Franny and The Thing, and sighs.

VOICE

Lemonade, fireman McCaffrey?

A short, weird looking kid is standing beside Brian with a pitcher and glass. This is NORMAN, a nine year old that suddenly woke up in a twenty year old's body.

BRIAN

Uh...sure.

Norman pours a glass. Brian accepts it, starts to move when The Thing GROWLS again. Norman pats it on the head.

NORMAN

(to Thing)

He's okay, boy. Go on and lay down.

It instantly obeys and trots off. Norman smiles at Brian and moves on.

BRIAN

Who is that kid, a fire groupie?

KRIZMINSKI

Don't let Norman hear you call him a groupie. He takes pride in his record.

BRIAN

What record?

KRIZMINSKI

Burned down ten buildings without ever being convicted. Good clean work, too.

BRIAN

He's an arsonist?

(they nod)

And you let him hang around here?

KRIZMINSKI

Not all the time. Sometimes we bring him along on fires.

BRIAN

Has it ever occurred to you guys that maybe that's a little insane?

KRIZMINSKI

It's not like he's a professional arsonist. He just likes to watch things burn. Now he can watch all the fires he wants and since we couldn't ever catch him, at least now we can keep an eye on him. Besides, he makes great lemonade. And his apple strudel? Man!

Brian shakes his head in amazement and heads upstairs for the BUNKROOM

Ten neat beds lined up on the beat-up hardwood floor, a brass pole in the corner. He drops his gear on the lone unclaimed mattress. Gives it a bounce. Lays back, locks his hands behind his neck, and gazes up at the 19th century ceiling. Home sweet home.

On the wall is a framed photograph of firemen posing together, each with a T-shirt proudly stenciled FIGHTING 17TH. One of the firemen is a very young Adcox. The other is his father.

Father and son exchange a long, awkward look.

INT. WASHROOM

Brian scrubs the morning's fire off his body in the station shower.

INT. LOCKER ROOM

Wrapped in a towel, Brian opens his locker. The mannequin from the fire SPRINGS OUT, legs spread. A sign taped to its mouth says: "TAKE ME BRIAN, YOU'RE MY SUPERMAN!"

Giggles.

Tim and Grindle are dressing at the other end of the bench. As Brian looks sharply up they take on expressions of saintly innocence. Grindle shoves off, leaving Tim under Brian's glare as the ALARM KLAXON suddenly sounds.

INT. APPARATUS FLOOR

Stephen's waiting at the bottom of the brass pole. Tim grabs the pole tentatively, half dressed.

STEPHEN

C'mon Tim! You're jumping on that pole like your balls were made out of glass! Go, go, go!

Tim slides down and steps off.

STEPHEN

Don't wait for your feet to hit. You'll get your teeth knocked out if anybody's on the way down behind you.

Brian's right behind Tim. Wearing just his towel, he aggressively jumps the pole, slides, and lets go two thirds of the way down, landing with a gymnast's balance.

STEPHEN

Who the fuck are you supposed to be,
Tarzan?

BRIAN

Hey, you said not to wait for your feet
to hit--

STEPHEN

I didn't say take off the head of the guy
ahead of you, which is exactly what would
happen with that kind of shit.

ADCOX

Jeez, Stephen, he's here to learn, ease
up a little--

STEPHEN

(whirls on him)

You think a fire's gonna ease up? You
think some grandmother in a wheelchair
or a couple'a kids in a crib are gonna
want me to drill this company with doggie
treats?

BRIAN

(beat)

Won't happen again.

STEPHEN

You're goddamn right it won't.

CUT TO:

EXT. - DAY

And Krizminski frantically pulling off lengths of hose from the
bed. Brian connects the line to a hydrant and spins the top nut
as Grindle revs up the pump panel's throttle. Adcox and Stephen
cautiously inch forward with the charged nozzle, hunker down, and
open up the stream on A BURNING HOUSE.

Or at least a small model of one.

APPLAUSE

We're on the blacktop of an elementary school, dozens of little
kids assembled for this demonstration by their teachers. They
love it as we

CUT TO:

The firemen handing out little plastic helmets and badges to the
kids. Stephen's by far the kids' favorite, they crowd
enthusiastically around him as he crouches down to tell a story.

STEPHEN

You guys like fire?

(they nod)

Sure you do. Fire's fun, fire's cool. It can talk to you, play with you. But it can also kill you...

He has them hypnotized as he weaves his cautionary fire story. Brian and Krizminski are rolling hose in the pumper bed. Brian watches his brother ooh and aah the children. Bigger than life, they all want a piece of him, to sit on his lap or just hold his hand as they're lovingly scared to death.

Brian and Krizminski are rolling hose in the pumper's bed.

BRIAN

You guys do a lot of this?

KRIZMINSKI

Yeah. Wow the kids and try to get them not to play with matches.

Stephen has finished his story and is lifting kids up into the cab of the fire engine. He absolutely beams with affection for them.

KRIZMINSKI

Man, that guy loves kids.

Tim's walked up to the hose bed from his truck company.

TIM

Does he have any?

BRIAN

Yeah. They just don't live with him.

EXT. FIRE STATION - DAY

An expanse of concrete lies out back of the station. Built in one corner is the concrete shell of a five story training building, just wide enough for a stairway and room on each level.

Twenty yards away, Brian, Tim and Adcox stand ready beside a pile of coiled hose rolls.

STEPHEN

(looking at watch)

Alright...Go!

Tim picks up a roll of hose, 50 pounds, throws it over his shoulder and runs with Adcox to the foot of the building. There's a fixed standpipe that Adcox ties into as Tim drags the other end inside and up a flight of stairs.

STEPHEN
Go!

Brian lifts another hose roll and runs for the building.

STEPHEN
On your shoulder! Your shoulder!

Brian's got the hose roll against his breast as he runs up two flights to meet with Tim and connect his end. Tim heads down for another roll as Brian drags his end up another two flights. It's a bitch.

Sweating, he barrels back down the stairs, passing Tim coming up with another roll.

BRIAN
Having fun, Fireman?

TIM
Fuck...

Brian sprints back to grab another roll.

STEPHEN
You're not breaking any records, Brian.

Brian holds it to his chest and takes off. Stephen grabs a roll himself, hoists it to his shoulder and runs alongside.

STEPHEN
Your shoulder, goddamn it! Like this!

Brian lifts it to his shoulder.

STEPHEN
Come on! Pick it up!

They come to the doorway. Instead of stopping, Stephen follows Brian in and runs alongside up the stairs. Without a word spoken it's become a race between them.

Brian's face explodes in sweat. His heart pounds as they go up flight after flight. The hose rolls weigh a hundred pounds now. A thousand.

Neck 'n neck all the way; grunting, their throats burning, only two flights from the roof Stephen STUMBLES and SCRAPES his leg. Brian pauses. Stephen's already back on his feet.

STEPHEN
Run, damn you!

Brian does, Stephen already gaining on him---getting ready to pass him--When they burst gasping out onto the roof, Brian the "winner" by a nose.

Stephen slams his fist against the doorway in frustration.

Shit!

STEPHEN

We see now what Stephen apparently doesn't. He was scraped badly, his pant leg torn and leaking dark circles of blood.

DOWN BELOW

The hoses are dragged back out to the concrete and left in a tangled heap.

STEPHEN

Okay guys, take five.

Exhausted, Brian and Tim head back for the station. Stephen puts out an arm and stops Brian.

STEPHEN

You can't just leave all this hose unrolled.

BRIAN

What, are you kidding? By myself?

STEPHEN

Who else?

Brian stares at him a beat, then turns for the station.

STEPHEN

Hey! What the fuck do you think you're doing?

BRIAN

Going inside till your brain's recovered from blood loss.

Stephen cuts him off, nose to nose.

STEPHEN

You got a problem with drilling, probie?

BRIAN

No, Captain, I don't have a problem with drilling. But let's just have one drill. Not one for the company and one for me.

STEPHEN

Roll the hose.

Stephen turns and walks away. Brian stands there watching him in blind fury, finally exploding.

BRIAN

Goddamn it! What's your problem!

STEPHEN

The problem's not here, man.

BRIAN

Yeah? Then why don't you ever lay this shit on Tim? I work as hard as he does. Is it the race up the stairs? Christ, I'll let you win next time!

STEPHEN

(steps up close)

You wanna talk about Tim? Alright, let's talk about how he doesn't have any family in the department. Let's talk about how he couldn't afford to go to college, how he had to bust his ass wide open on the entrance test just to get by the affirmative action and the all the other guys that couldn't afford college. Let's talk about he isn't the son of a dead fireman, and how if he fucks up, even once, they'll throw him right back where he started, behind the counter of a 7-11 for life. So don't talk to me about Tim. He earned his spot here with something you'll never have, a heart for this job.

BRIAN

Goddamn it Stephen, who cares why I'm here? I show up. I do the job as well as anyone. I don't need anyone to love me, alright?

STEPHEN

Well, that's good to know.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FIRE STATION APPARATUS FLOOR

Stephen has one of the rig's side doors open. He's spread out on the floor three disassembled air packs. Tim is beside him, blindfolded.

STEPHEN

Okay, try it.

Tim tries to reassemble the intricate valve parts as fast as he can by feel. It's almost impossible. Parts keep slipping through his fingers. He finally gives up and takes the blindfold off.

STEPHEN

That's okay. It's hard. But it's worth learning. They don't teach this in the academy but they should. You're in a fire, can't see a thing, and your air line jams. Knowing this could save your life. Try it again.

He does. With only slightly better results.

STEPHEN

Better. Don't worry, it took me a couple dozen times to get it right.

Nearby Brian finally finishes loading the last roll of hose into the wall racks. Zombie-like he stumbles for the kitchen. The Thing cuts him off. GROWLS at him.

STEPHEN

Hey, Brian, c'mere and try this.

BRIAN

Is that an order?

STEPHEN

I'm showing Tim something.

BRIAN

Oh, well, then by all means.

He walks over, sits down, puts on the blindfold. With amazing speed he assembles the air pack perfectly and without a word kicks it across the floor to a stunned Stephen, gets up, and walks right past the Thing into the kitchen.

DISSOLVE TO:

A RESTAURANT

That's been cleared out for a huge WEDDING RECEPTION in full swing. An Irish folk band cuts loose a merciless bagpipe beat. The dancing is wild and unrestrained. On chairs, tables, even occasionally the floor. The guests are all firemen and their families, for this is the wedding of Fitzgerald's, the academy chief's, daughter. He strolls the room proudly, shaking hands.

Brian enters, seeks out a beer, catches Fitzgerald's eye.

FITZGERALD

Fireman McCaffrey.

BRIAN

Congratulations, sir.

Fitzgerald nods coolly and moves on.
CHEERS as an impossibly chocolate groom's cake shaped like a fire nozzle is laid before the newlyweds.

Brian heads for the buffet table. Rubs shoulders with Stephen.

STEPHEN

Ballsy move, coming to his daughter's wedding.

Swaying slightly, Stephen holds what is clearly not his first drink of the evening.

BRIAN

I'm not some deformed relative that has to be kept in the attic, Stephen. This is my department too.

Stephen's eyes catch a woman dancing with another fireman out on the floor.

STEPHEN (distracted)

Yeah. Right.

Brian slips through the Celtic crush, loosens his tie and leans up against a crepe paper wall.

A YOUNG GIRL, sexily compact in short skirt and cocky as the lock of short blonde hair curled over one eye, sits on a tall speaker balancing a champagne glass on her thigh.

GIRL

So. Brian.

BRIAN

So. Rita.

GIRL

You're back.

BRIAN

Old news.

GIRL

Didn't notice, I guess. You didn't make as big a fuss as you did leaving.

A cold smile. Brian just relaxes, knows what's coming.

GIRL

Of course I guess it'd be hard to top that. Something about getting out of this "black hole". I can't remember, was that before or after you took my skirt off? What was it you said you were going to do? Let's see...Oh yeah, "knock them dead". What happened, Brian? Didn't you knock 'em dead?

She spreads her knees slightly, Lolita heating up with each thrust of the knife. Brian grins emptily.

BRIAN

Well, if nothing else it's nice to know that we can still be friends.

GIRL

Welcome home, Brian. Welcome home...

Several couples are dancing in the center of the room. One is the attractive woman and her fireman date that Stephen was staring at earlier. They're dancing close, feeling the heat, drifting across the floor. Right past where Stephen stands downing another drink.

STEPHEN

Hello, Helen.

FIREMAN

How ya doin', Stephen?

STEPHEN

I'm talking to my wife, Jackson.

HELEN

Ex-wife.

Jackson steers her away but Stephen isn't done yet. He dogs them.

STEPHEN

Y'know Helen, there's what, like forty-seven hundred guys on this department? Of all of them, why the hell did you pick this turkey?

HELEN

Oh god, Stephen, will you please leave it alone?

STEPHEN

He's a goddamn Swayzak lap dog. He's helping that son of a bitch cut us.

JACKSON

You're drunk, Stephen. Give it a rest.

STEPHEN

I mean, Helen, I know you gotta fuck somebody, but why does it have to be this cocksucker?

Jackson lets go of Helen and confronts Stephen.

JACKSON
That's just about enough.

STEPHEN
Y'know, I have to work with shitheads like
you, but I'll be God-damned if I'm going to
watch you dance with my wife--

And he PLOWS into Jackson. Another fireman JUMPS to Jackson's
aid. In a instant Brian's there, defending his brother, PUNCHING
OUT a fireman.

Fitzgerald and others finally pull the two apart. Stephen
savagely pushes Brian away.

STEPHEN
I don't need your fucking help!

JACKSON
Your man's crazy, Fitz! Fucking crazy!

BRIAN
Come on, calm down--

STEPHEN
Stay away from me!

BRIAN
You're out of control, man.

STEPHEN
Just stay the fuck away from me, understand?
Just leave me alone...

He wipes the blood from his nose, pats Fitzgerald affectionately
on the back, and heads for the bar.

STEPHEN
I need a drink.

Fitzgerald watches him with almost admiration.

FITZGERALD
Fights almost as good as his father.

(beat)
But I suppose you wouldn't know about that.

The two stare at each other coldly. Across the room, Rita grins
emptily at the proceedings.

RITA
(to friend)
Those McCaffrey boys. Just can't seem to
get a handle on their women...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - DAY

It's another day and bar fights, like hangovers, only have a twenty-four hour lifespan.

As Adcox and Krizminski relax in lawn chairs on the driveway catching rays, Brian and Tim work up a sweat polishing the seemingly endless chrome on the fire engine.

STEPHEN'S VOICE

(on intercom)

All personnel, all personnel, report to
rec room for training.

Tim and Brian gratefully chuck their polishing rags and head for the

REC ROOM

Where Stephen is loading up a video tape. Everybody collapses onto couches, chairs, a piece of carpet.

As Stephen hits the play switch, Brian's eyes drift to the ceiling, bored already. Suddenly he hears, coming from the tape, HIS VOICE.

BRIAN'S VOICE

Hey! You! Tired of listening to today's
hits on yesterday's equipment? Want to
upgrade but think you can't afford
it? Listen!

Everyone in the room cracks up. The tape is a commercial, a hilariously cheap one, featuring Brian. Wearing a hideous sport coat, waving his arms like a madman, he lets loose his rapid-fire spiel over badly chromokeyed color slides.

BRIAN

(on tape)

Now you can order these! The newest stereo
technology BY PHONE! Woofers, tweeters,
Panasonic, RCA, all the hottest brands
FOR LESS! We have no STORE! No OVERHEAD!
We can't be UNDERSOLD!

ADCOX

Gee, Bri, you never mentioned having
such an illustrious career...

Brian, embarrassed, starts for the VCR.

BRIAN

Okay, very funny--

Adcox and Stephen TACKLE him to the floor.

BRIAN

(on tape)

. . . So get rid of those static filled dust collectors you've been putting up with--

Brian PUMMELS old stereo equipment with a mallet as he speaks--

BRIAN

(on tape)

--And call me, the KING OF STEREO!

His voice erupts in thunderous reverb as a crown appears on his head in a really, really bad jump cut.

BRIAN

(on tape)

And let me BEAM you up to the future of sound!

Now Brian is "beamed-up" in a cheap special effect, leaving behind a blank screen with the super "THE KING OF STEREO" and a phone number to order a catalog.

The firemen go nuts. Brian tries to get up but Stephen won't give. He throws his back into it and now they're wrestling across the carpet. The firemen CHEER. Brian grunts and goes for a reverse that Stephen avoids.

STEPHEN

You've been doing that since the third grade and it still doesn't work.

They roll over. Stephen gets a half-nelson.

STEPHEN

Give up.

BRIAN

Forget it.

STEPHEN

I can't be beat at this, Brian, you know that.

BRIAN

I'll put it on your tombstone.

Brian suddenly FLIPS Stephen over. The firemen goes nuts. It's a dead heat now, both faces pressed flat against the carpet.

BRIAN'S POV

A sideways view of dark blue trouser legs and scuffed black boots. Suddenly, pressing through them is

A PAIR OF LONG, HIGH-HEELED WOMAN'S LEGS

--The cheering stops dead. Stephen and Brian release each other, rug burns on their faces.

STEPHEN

Can I help you?

JENNIFER

I'm Jennifer Winslow, from the Commissioner's office.

ADCOX

Well, the devil's emissary.

JENNIFER

Don't worry, I've already had my quota of souls this week. I'm here to meet the hero of Engine 17.

Blank faces.

ADCOX

I don't know about a hero Ma'am, but would you settle for a king?

Laughs.

Jennifer drops the day's newspaper onto the coffee table. Right on the front page is a two-photograph spread titled DARING FIRE RESCUE.

The first picture shows Brian rushing out of the burning building with seemingly a woman in his arms. The second photo shows the backs of Adcox and Tim's helmets as they administered aid to the real woman they saved. The implication is that it's the same woman.

ADCOX

Oh no...

He picks it up. Reads.

ADCOX

"Probationary Fireman Brian McCaffrey, on his very first fire, showed the kind of bravery and courage rarely found even in veterans. Daringly risking life and limb to double-check a burning floor alone, he emerges victoriously with Anna Ramirez, a seamstress for the North Shore Clothing Company".

KRIZMINSKI
I don't believe this.

TIM
Somebody get a shovel!

But it's good natured ribbing. Everybody pats him on the back.
Except Stephen.

BRIAN
Well ma'am, it was hell, but when a taxpayer's in trouble, shucks, I guess I just think it's my duty to do something, no matter what the danger.

JENNIFER
How wonderfully insincere.
(firemen laugh)
The reason I'm here, Fireman McCaffrey, is that my boss is having a small get-together tonight. With your captain's permission, he'd like to meet you. Unless of course you have something better to do.

BRIAN
Well, to be honest I'd rather hang around here polishing brass and be abused by my superiors.

STEPHEN
Forget it, lady. Fireman McCaffrey has a job to do right here till seven AM tomorrow morning. Your boss can get in line.

BRIAN
Oh, so now you want me here? Oughta make up your mind, Cap.

JENNIFER
(to Stephen)
Actually, I'm afraid the Commissioner's already spoken to your fire chief, Captain. He's okayed us borrowing Brian here for an evening. We'll bring him back in one piece. Promise.

BRIAN
What do I have to do there?

JENNIFER
Just put on a suit and be yourself.

BRIAN
Lady, I've been waiting years for that invitation.

STEPHEN
Don't you walk out of here, Brian. Don't you
leave this company a man down. Not for that
bastard.

BRIAN
Gotta follow orders, Cap.
(pats his cheek)
See ya next shift.
(holds his arm out to Jennifer)
Madam?

She accepts and they walk for the door, to the stunned amazement
of his engine mates.

Stephen HEAVES the tape box in anger, SLAMMING it against the
wall.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT

DISSOLVE TO:

Standing at the mirror, he tries his tie on this way and that
until we hear a car honk outside.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jennifer's waiting there, leaning on the door of her convertible
Jaguar, looking amazing in a sheer cocktail dress.

JENNIFER
Nice place.

BRIAN
It's temporary.

JENNIFER
With any luck.

EXT. LAKE SHORE MANSION

A beautiful, luxurious home perched on the edge of a shimmering
Lake Michigan. All manner of German technology crowd the driveway.

INSIDE

Hundreds of the high-rollers that grease the Chicago machine
mingle and schmooze with bubbling flutes of champagne. Waiters,
original French watercolors, a live string quartet. On the wall
hangs a banner, "SWAYZAK FOR MAYOR".
Brian and Jennifer enter.

JENNIFER
So, what do you think?

Brian gives a so-so sign. Jennifer laughs and takes his arm.

JENNIFER
Come Mr. McCaffrey, be introduced...

DISSOLVE TO:
Brian meeting a variety of movers and shakers. Shy and quiet at first, he grows boisterous, charming each introduction. He's feeling good, feeling in his element.

DISSOLVE TO:
Brian ordering a drink from the bar. A rather prim woman is standing beside him. She sniffs the air quizzically, wrinkling her nose.

WOMAN
Is something burning?

She brazenly leans over and sniffs Brian's arm, following it up to his hair.

BRIAN
Cologne. "Le Arsoniste".

WOMAN
New?

BRIAN
Got it just this morning.

CUT TO:
Jennifer and Brian dancing. Slow but not that slow.

JENNIFER
You're a hit, Brian.

BRIAN
Yeah, these guys giggle like I just gave them a stock tip.

JENNIFER
You gave them something more valuable. A wiff of danger. These gentlemen have to spend millions buying a race car or jets to get just a taste of what you do every day. It fascinates them. Each morning going to work and staring down the devil.

BRIAN
Given who you work for I could say the same thing.

Just then Commissioner Swayzak appears and pumps Brian's hand.

SWAYZAK

Mr. McCovrey, it's a pleasure to meet you.

BRIAN

McCaffrey.

JENNIFER

This is the Commissioner, Brian.

BRIAN

Of course. Mr. Swayzit.

SWAYZAK

Swayzak.

JENNIFER

The commissioner was very impressed by what he saw in the paper today, Brian.

BRIAN

It was nothing. Honest. Nine other guys were up there with me.

SWAYZAK

Let me buy you a drink.

Jennifer and Swayzak lead Brian to a more private corner and pour him some wine.

SWAYZAK

To be honest, Mr. McCaffrey, I have a problem you might be able to help me with.

BRIAN

And what would that be?

SZWAYZAK

Public relations. You see, the work my office has been doing in streamlining the department has been so distorted by the firefighter's union, that's there's been a virtual shut-down in communication between us.

BRIAN

They think you've dummied up your stats as an excuse to cut the department for political points. They think that's hurting them.

JENNIFER

Do you?

BRIAN
(beat)

I don't know.

SWAYZAK
Well, you did try to bribe an assignment officer just to get placed in one of our new station concepts. Case of scotch, wasn't it?

Brian looks embarrassed.

SWAYZAK
--Don't get me wrong. I'm impressed by the initiative. It shows me someone who's behind our program. A red-blooded hero from a big, traditional fire fighting clan.

BRIAN
Yeah, we got all kinds of traditions, like dying young. I'm a failure of course; when my dad was my age, he was dead already.

JENNIFER
You know, there are some jobs in the Department that don't kill you.

BRIAN
I'm listening.

SWAYZAK
We were thinking, if you're interested of course, of assigning you as a kind of liaison with the arson squad. Attach you with a more experienced investigator.

JENNIFER
Do you know Investigator Rimgale?

BRIAN
Tall guy? Doesn't talk much?

JENNIFER
Exactly.

SWAYZAK
We'd like you to work with him a bit. A sort of internship. Someone of your background could only help our image with the rest of the department.

BRIAN
Yeah, you'd be surprised by my influence there.

JENNIFER

This could be a great opportunity, Brian.

BRIAN

Or just another way to get burned.

SWAYZAK

Don't answer now. Go home tonight and think about it.

(beat)

Think about your future.

Swayzak shakes Brian's hand.

SWAYZAK

It was a pleasure meeting you, son. Hope to see you again soon.

Swayzak and Jennifer exchange brief glances, and then he's gone, disappeared into a sea of wealth.

BRIAN

Now what?

JENNIFER

We dance.

And they do. He's good. She's better.

BRIAN

You like your job?

JENNIFER

It's alright. I'm not sure people should be in love with what they do. It's the Calvinist in me. How about you?

BRIAN

You don't spend each day so much liking my job as surviving it.

JENNIFER

That's very Calvinist. Why did you join?

BRIAN

A lot of people keep asking me that.

JENNIFER

What do you tell them?

BRIAN

That you had to be there.

JENNIFER

I hope you'll take Martin's offer, Brian.
He's a good man.

BRIAN

Some people think he's wrecking a department
just to get elected mayor.

JENNIFER

There hasn't been a cut made that wasn't
verified by our studies.

BRIAN

People are getting killed because of those
studies.

JENNIFER

People are getting killed because this dept.
is too pig-headed to modernize. "150 YEARS
OF TRADITION UNIMPEDED BY PROGRESS", they're
proud of that slogan.

BRIAN

They're proud of their job, Jennifer.

JENNIFER

Oh yes, the last macho fire department. Boys
trying to prove they're men by doing it
the hard way. That's what's killing them. Not
our station concept.

BRIAN

One of those "boys" was my father.

They dance some more but the fun's gone out of it. Brian lets go.

BRIAN

This is stupid.

And leaves her there.

JENNIFER

Follows him out into the main entry room. Takes his arm.

JENNIFER

Brian, I'm sorry. I apologize. I didn't
mean to offend you. Hell, I'm trying to
offer you a job. Promise me you'll
think about it?

He hesitates. He doesn't really want to leave it like this.

JENNIFER

You seem like a guy with a lot of potential. I'd just hate to see it get burned up in a fire.

And as a waiter couses a platter of baked apples in brandy, as he tosses in a match and it FLAMES UP

CUT TO:

A wall of fire LASHING down a staircase, KNOCKING Brian on his ass. He crawls to his knees, the fire laughing at him. Stephen comes up from behind carrying an axe.

STEPHEN

Don't take that kind of shit from it!
Don't let it know you're scared! Come on!

Suddenly Stephen, with just his axe, CHASES up the stairs at the fire, HAMMERING at the flaming boards. The fire retreats into another room, SLAMMING the door shut behind it.

STEPHEN

(to Brian)

Are you coming or not!

BRIAN

Shit...

Brian comes up the stairs. The two of them slide up on either side of the closed door, Stephen cradling his axe like a SWAT team shotgun. The door breathes in and out and something animal scratches and snarls on the other side.

BRIAN

Jesus Christ, Stephen.

Brian can feel the panic rising in his throat. That thing behind the door, that slobbering, evil thing. It wants out. It wants...him.

STEPHEN

Ready?

BRIAN

Let's wait for the hose team, Stephen...

STEPHEN

No time.

BRIAN

Let's wait for the goddamn hose team!

STEPHEN

We're going now!

Stephen HAMMERS the lock with his axe, steps back, and KICKS the door open. A WALL OF FLAME ROARS out past their cheeks, then BACKWASHES in.

Now! STEPHEN

Fuck you! BRIAN

Stephen picks up the door, and using it as a shield CHARGES into the flames. Brian stands there. He can't, he won't, go in there.

Almost immediately Adcox and Krizminski are coming up the stairs with a hoseline. They open it up and WASH DOWN the room. Clouds of furious steam bellow out and across the ceiling. Nobody could be alive in there.

Except Stephen. His entire outfit smoldering around his ears, he emerges from the clouds like a fucking god, carrying in one arm a gasping child.

He doesn't even look at Brian as he passes.

EXT. BURNED BUILDING - DAY

Brian sits there on the pumper bumper, just staring off into nothing.

STEPHEN
(walks up)
I think she'll live. It was close, but it looks like she'll pull through.

BRIAN
If we'd waited for the hose team she'd have died.

STEPHEN
I didn't wait.

BRIAN
I did.

STEPHEN
Yeah. You sure did.

A beat as long and heavy as lead.

STEPHEN
Who are you trying to kid, Brian?

Without a word Brian gets up, sets his helmet on the truck, and walks away.

INT JENNIFER WINSLOW'S OFFICE

There's only six like it in city hall, and this one has a view.
Her intercom buzzes.

SECRETARY'S VOICE
Brian McCaffrey on line two.

Jennifer smiles and picks up the receiver...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT FIRE STATION - DAY

An ancient, crumbling one. Brian doubles checks the address on his slip of paper and enters.

INT. FIRE STATION/ARSON HQ

The back of the station has been converted into offices, the door marked OFFICE OF FIRE INVESTIGATION. Brian pokes his head in. The secretary is on two phones and three typewriters.

BRIAN
Excuse me, I'm looking for Investigator
Rimgale.

She points over her shoulder. Brian wanders back into a large room with a huge map of Chicago on the wall. Beneath a handful of investigators wrestle computer terminals, fire chem books, or just the cigarette ash dangling from their mouths. It's a jangly, noisy place.

--But for the corner. There, in an island of calm, sits Rimgale. He's staring out the window as Brian walks up to his spotless desk. He stands there, waiting for Rimgale to acknowledge him. The moment never comes. Brian clears his throat.

BRIAN
Inspector Rimgale? My name's Brian McCaffrey.
I'm your new assistant.

Rimgale stares at him for an inordinate amount of time.

RIMGALE
I work alone.

BRIAN
I don't think you understand, I--

--But Rimgale's already turned back to the work on his desk.

CUT TO:

Brian still sitting there. Rimgale still ignoring him.

CUT TO:

Brian playing with a rubber band, feet up on a desk.

CUT TO:

A Man, 40s, DAVID BENTON and his young date, giggling drunkedly as they pour out of a taxi. Benton, casually wealthy, makes leering suggestions to the girl and tries to coax her up to his trendy, modern apartment behind them. She smiles and teases and eventually gets back into the taxi.

None the worse for it, Benton sways up the staircase to a second floor apartment on an open stairwell. He keeps trying to get his keys in the lock but the aim's bad. Drunk enough to find this funny, he leans against the door and slides down against it. Then, in a flip move, zooms his clenched key over his head and into the lock with one try.

It'd have been a good story if he'd lived longer.

The door EXPLODES OUTWARD, SMOTHERING the stairwell in a ROARING FIREBALL

WHILE BACK AT ARSON HQ

Brian has got the makings of a dinosaur going with a paper clip and a few rubber bands. Rimgale walks back in from a file room.

RIMGALE

Are you still here?

BRIAN

Get used to me, Inspector. I'm not going anywhere.

RIMGALE

Then go find a desk in a corner so I do't have to stare at you so much.

BRIAN

I was assigned by the commissioner personally to be your assistant. How about some respect?

RIMGALE

You want respect around here you earn it, just like the rest of the fire department.

Rimgale's phone RINGS.
 He picks it up, writes down an address, and gets up from his desk. He's half way to the door when he stops and turns to Brian.

RIMGALE

Coming?

EXT. APARTMENT HOUSE - SUNDOWN

An engine company has already knocked down the trendy apartment fire as Brian climbs out of Rimgale's red sedan.

RIMGALE

Hey, McCaffrey--

(opens trunk)

Make yourself useful.

He starts handing Brian handfuls of equipment cases. Loaded down he follows Rimgale up the exterior stairwell to the apartment. They're met by the engine company CAPTAIN.

ENGINE CAPTAIN

We were lucky with this one. Could've taken out the whole complex, but the explosion blew out most of the flame. Good for us.

(looks back towards the car)

-Bad for him.

"Him" is our previous owner, blown forward into iron railing so hard he's been pushed through and fused with parts of it like modern sculpture.

INSIDE

Rimgale crouches beside the apartment's front door, lying twisted on the ground from the blast.

RIMGALE

Give me a hand with this...

They turn it over. The corpse's keys are still in the lock. On the door's edge Rimgale notices a small patch of melted, sticky goo. With his penknife he scrapes a sample and seals it in a glass vial, stands, and walks into the apartment.

BRIAN

What do you want me to do with--

RIMGALE

-Shhh.

BRIAN (after a beat)

What are you listening to?

The fire. RIMGALE

Isn't it out? BRIAN

How much arson training have you had? RIMGALE

Just the academy. BRIAN

Then stop talking and pay attention. Fires RIMGALE
are like children, they like to hide, but
if you know how to listen they always tell
you what you want to know. And this one's
already telling me we're in the wrong room.

How do you know? BRIAN

Are you actually interested in learning? RIMGALE

That's why I'm here. BRIAN

Exactly why you're here remains to be seen. RIMGALE
(beat, then:)
See the walls here? Heavy smoke stains. This
room never got hot enough to cook any of the
soot off. The fire started somewhere else.
(they walk down hall)
Less soot here. More heat. We're getting warmer.
(they enter back bedroom)
And very little soot here. Let's move the couch.

They pull it away. The lower third of the wall is completely
untouched by soot.

Soot high, clean unburned wall low, that RIMGALE
means a slow burn in thermal balance.
(looks around)
Find me some glass.

Glass? BRIAN

What, do we have a language barrier here? RIMGALE
Glass. Clear stuff.

Brian sifts till he comes up with a piece of shattered window. Rimgale turns it over in his palm.

RIMGALE

See how it's broken in small, thin pieces? That's a sign of an explosion. Look how it's heavily discolored -lots of smoke. That means a long, slow burn that wasn't hot enough to break the glass. And the glass is on top of the debris, so the explosion came after the slow burn. What does that leave us with?

BRIAN

Not a bomb. Bomb's don't burn hot and slow then explode. Also wasn't leaky gas. Same reason.

RIMGALE

Good, an almost intelligent answer. Now find me some deep char.

Brian scrapes down the wall with a claw tool, finally sinking it into heavily charcoaled wood.

BRIAN

I got it.

Rimgale probes the char with his penknife. It leads down--down--to a wall socket. Rimgale peels back the melted faceplate.

RIMGALE

The plug's melted. This could be our source of ignition. Problem is deciding if it's arson or not.

BRIAN

We should check the wires.

RIMGALE

What do you have in mind?

BRIAN

They'll tell you if a fire melted the plug from the outside or started inside.

RIMGALE

(intrigued)

Go on.

Brian snips a piece of electrical wire from the plug and holds it up to the light. The insulation has sleeved away from the wire, revealing a copper tip severely melted.

BRIAN

A fire starting around the plug, on the floor or wall, only gets up to what?

RIMGALE

About 2000 degrees.

BRIAN

That isn't hot enough to melt a wire. But a true electrical short discharges a bolt of 7000 degrees. That rips the insulation away and melts the wire --just like this.

RIMGALE

(impressed)

You didn't pick that up in the academy.

BRIAN

In another life I was in electronics. Stereo stuff. Then it looks like we have an accidental fire from an electrical short, right?

RIMGALE

Whoa. Slow down. That's was a decent call with the wire, but don't get ahead of yourself. A smart fire can screw with your mind just for the fun of it. And a smart torch can trick a dumb fire into lying for him. Arson rule #1: Fire lies.

(sighs)

I've been trying to explain that to our lovely fire commissioner but he's not a very patient guy.

Rimgale opens a plastic bag.

RIMGALE

Cut the plug loose. We'll have it analyzed for any trace chemicals that might have been dusted on it.

BRIAN

And the explosion?

RIMGALE

Yeah, the explosion...

(studies walls)

What were you up to, you little bastard, huh? What made you that mad?

(then an idea)

Or scared.

He's on to something now. Chasing clues only he can see.

RIMGALE

The fire started in that corner. But it wasn't in a hurry, hell, nobody was home, plenty of time to punch out a window for air later. It just hung out, fat, lazy and slow in thermal balance. But what our fire forgot was this is an older building. Lots of brick. When the air ran low it tried to punch out but couldn't. So it panicked and shot across the walls, searching for a way through before it was snuffed. All that heat all dressed up with nowhere to go. Laying low, showing no smoke. Waiting all night for some poor dumb sucker to open the door and give it that one sweet gulp of air...

BRIAN

--Backdraft.

RIMGALE

You've been reading your fire chem.

BRIAN

A backdraft killed my father.

OUTSIDE

Jennifer and a photographer are waiting as Rimgale and Brian come down the stairs.

JENNIFER

Inspector Rimgale. Good to see you on the job.

RIMGALE

Your confidence is a true inspiration to me, Ms. Winslow.

JENNIFER

Brian. I'd like to take a few pictures of you for our publicity release. Young hero fireman on the job.

BRIAN

Uh Jennifer--

JENNIFER

(to photographer)

--What do you think of the background? Dramatic enough?

PHOTOGRAPHER

Perfect.

JENNIFER
Inspector Rimgale, maybe you could stand
beside Brian. Put your arm around him.

Rimgale just stares at her.

RIMGAL
I don't work for you.

Rimgale looks at Brian, his estimation of him dropping about a million percent. He turns and walks away. As Brian watches him leave, the photographer begins FLASHING.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Grit your teeth Mr. McCaffrey. Look more
...determined.

As the flashes bury Brian in a strobing sea, Rimgale shakes his head and drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Helen, Stephen's ex-wife, is sitting at her kitchen table having a coffee. Sh looks up suddenly at a strange sound coming from the roof.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

It's modest and south-side Irish old fashioned, with dormer windows and short, sloping sections of roof. It's there, on one of the eaves, that Stephen stands hammering a shingle back into place.

Helen sticks her head out the dormer.

HELEN
Stephen, what are doing here?

STEPHEN
Fixing my roof.

HELEN
It's not your roof anymore.

He stops and tosses the hammer aside.

STEPHEN
Is Sean around?

HELEN
He's at school.

STEPHEN

Oh yeah. How's he doing?

HELEN

Against all my best efforts I think he's determined to become a fireman.

STEPHEN

Give up, Helen. It's in the blood.

Beat.

HELEN

Stephen, you can't keep coming around here like this. There's a wonderful invention called the telephone. Use it once in awhile.

STEPHEN

I just wanted to apologize for the other evening at Fitzgerald's. I don't remember much of it, but what I do seems to require an apology.

HELEN

You were impossible.

STEPHEN

Did I really hit Jackson?

HELEN

Twice.

STEPHEN

Sorry.

HELEN

He deserved it. He was born deserving it.

STEPHEN

He treats you okay?

HELEN

Okay.

STEPHEN

I treated you better.

HELEN

You treated me like shit.

But she smiles.

HELEN

You want some coffee or something?

STEPHEN

No, I gotta go.

HELEN

What's wrong, Stephen?

(looks at her)

C'mon, you only beat up the roof when something's on your mind.

She knows him too well.

STEPHEN

Brian. He shouldn't be here, Helen. Working for that son of a bitch Swayzak. My own brother...I don't know. I don't know what the hell's going on anymore.

HELEN

Stephen, you can't keep trying to be his father. You ought to work on just being Stephen. He was a pretty good guy once.

STEPHEN

Once.

He hops down from the roof to the driveway.

STEPHEN

You know I can't remember my dad's face anymore? There's pictures of him staring at me everywhere I go in this department, but the guy behind them, he's slipping away from me...

(beat)

I'll see ya around, Helen.

She watches him with concern as he walks lonely up the street.

INT. CITY CRIME LAB

Brian weaves his way through the evidence counters, finally spotting Rimgale.

RIMGALE

I thought you'd take the rest of the day off.

BRIAN

Nah, doesn't take any time at all to sell your soul.

A LAB TECH steps up with a plastic evidence bag and file.

LAB TECH

Okay, work-up on the Seagrave and Benton fires.

RIMGALE

(to Brian)

A lab run's routine whenever there's bodies, particularly airborne ones.

TECH

(reading report)

Alan Seagrave, 54, attorney. Death due to close encounter with '84 Impala. David Benton, 44, accountant. Blown into metal railing. No non-relevant traumas. No significant blood toxicology. Benton had been drinking. Attitude of both trajectories consistent with explosion.

(flips page)

Did a chemical on the goo you scraped from both front doors. It's a hydrocarbon base of dioxoethylene --duct tape.

RIMGALE

Duct tape?

TECH

Don't look at me, mon cheri.

(picks up evidence bag)

Did a work-up on the electrical socket you tagged as the fire's origin with Benton. Showed no trace of added accelerants.

BRIAN

Then nobody splashed it with anything to speed the fire up.

RIMGALE

(non-committal)

Hmm.

TECH

Did a random spectro on both corpse's clothes. On a lucky shot we picked up readings of Trychticholorate on Benton.

RIMGALE

Never heard of it.

TECH

Had to look it up. It's an absorption catalyst in heavy duty toxic waste accidents. Real rare. Probably got in Benton's clothes in a gas state from the fire.

RIMGALE

What was it doing in the fire?

TECH

It wasn't under the sink with the drano and pledge if that's what you're wondering. The trych we read in the guy's clothes was pure, and that's nasty, unstable stuff.

RIMGALE

Who has access to that chemical?

TECH

Pure? Almost nobody. Maybe DowCo in Gary.

INT. ARSON HQ

It's night out the window. Rimgale's at his desk pouring over notes. Brian stands at a blackboard crammed with murder's minutia. Glances at his watch.

BRIAN

I thought this was a nine-to-five job.

RIMGALE

We stay till the work gets done. You have a problem with that?

BRIAN

No sir.

Rimgale's eyes drift to a city map beside the board, red squares loudly marking in a tight grouping the backdrafts.

RIMGALE

Five backdraft burns in District 4 in six weeks. You know how many backdraft fires happen across the whole city in a normal year? Four.

BRIAN

Then Swayzak's right. Someone's torching these.

RIMGALE

That isn't proof. The thing I can't understand is if it's arson, why backdrafts? Those are hardest kind of fires to light. There's a helluva a lot of ways easier to get rid of someone. Why go to that trouble...

EXT. BUILDING - NIGHT

A fire died here recently, its ghost the sighing tendrils of steam drifting out scorched windows. Victorious hose teams skitter about inside, finishing their work, flashlights like dancing fireflies.

ON THE ROOF

Stephen and Adcox, smudged with the guts of the vanquished, take a break and a smoke. City lights glow like carnivals over the horizon.

TIM

(approaching)

Finished with the salvage, Cap.

STEPHEN

Give Kriz a hand with the hose.

TIM

Sure.

(beat)

Just wanted to say you did a helluva job with this fire, Captain. Ate it like it was a cream bagel.

STEPHEN

Thanks, Tim.

ADCOX

(as Tim leaves)

Kid's got a crush on you.

(Stephen snorts)

No, for real. I think he's got your picture in his locker.

STEPHEN

The only thing he'd better have pinned up in his locker are fire chem tables; there's a test next month.

ADCOX

He'll do okay.

STEPHEN

With any luck there'll still be a fire department left for him to join...

Stephen looks out across the steaming roofboards, to the scurrying black helmets below and their idling fire engines shooting up whacks of rotating red light. His hands clench with emotion.

STEPHEN

Everything I know, everything I am, is about this job. I swear to God, when someone starts messing with it, it's like they're messing with my family.

ADCOX

You gotta find a place for it all, Stephen.
You can't let it eat you up.

STEPHEN

But what do you do with the hate, John, huh?
What do you do with the hate...

Stephen and Adcox watch as

DOWN BELOW

The arson sedan pulls up. Rimgale and Brian get out. Brian sets off immediately for the building.

RIMGALE

Hey, probie, slow down.

(Brian pauses)

Don't be in such a hurry. Take it in first.
Is there any wind? What's the air temp? What
does the night feel like?

(beat)

Arson's the hardest crime to prove. You
have to be smarter than a cop. Take your
time. Use the one advantage we have.

BRIAN

Which is?

RIMGALE

In arson you can't hide the body.

INSIDE THE BUILDING

Walls hiss as water gurgles between floorboards.
Rimgale folds his arms and leans against the doorway.

RIMGALE

So find me the fire.

Brian grins at the challenge. He walks out into the room,
checks the walls and floor.

Some firemen tromp through on their way out to the trucks.

TIM

Hey, Brian, looking good.

BRIAN

Hey, Tim, looking shitty.

(moving cabinet)

Here, give me a hand with this.

They shove it aside. Brian inspects the smoke patterns on the wall.

BRIAN
Hey, Fireman Krizminski, scrape down some
of this wall for me.

KRIZMINSKI
Why yes sir, Inspector McCaffrey.

BRIAN
Grindle, give him a hand, huh?
(as Grindle walks over)
I would myself, but the shirt 'n tie, y'know...
Krizminski and Grindle scrape off some of the soot with claw
tools.

BRIAN
(having fun with it)
C'mon guys, put your shoulders into it.
Brian bends down and examines the exposed plaster beneath.

BRIAN
Hmmm...deep char high on the wall...
Brian looks to Rimgale for support but he reveals nothing. The
Sphynx. Stephen's come the stairs from the roof. Brian's showing
off now.

BRIAN
...Scorched flooring...clearly an open burn
system in thermal balance...
Grindle and Krizminski exchange glances with Stephen, who smiles
conspiratorially.

STEPHEN
Y'know Brian, you may be on to something.
Take a look at this...
Brian walks over and checks the piece of flooring.

BRIAN
Ah ha, I was right. See, the fire started over
there and traveled along this axis.

KRIZMINSKI
You got an eye for this, man.

GRINDLE
(in corner)
Jesus Christ, the kid's a genius. Look, the
proof's right here.

BRIAN
(coming over)
Where?

STEPHEN
(directing him)
Little to the right...further...further...
Right behind the pipe pole.

There's a pipe pole leaning against the wall. Brian pulls it aside.

SPLASH --The pole had been supporting a small, sagging piece of ceiling that instantly collapses, dumping twenty gallons of murky, putrid black water all over Brian's civvys. Everybody cracks up.

STEPHEN
Sorry, maybe that wasn't it after all.

More laughs as they head back out for the engine, leaving a soggy, fuming Brian behind. Wiping the slippery gunk from his eyes, he stomps angrily for the door. Rimgale, without moving an inch from his relaxed, arms folded position, says calmly as he passes:

RIMGALE
So Probie, are you ready to really learn about arson?

Brian pauses. Rimgale pulls a small can from his coat, pours from it a liquid onto the floor, and strikes a match.

RIMGALE
In a word, what is this job about?

BRIAN
Fire.

Rimgale drops the match. -WUMP. A small flame explodes to life.

RIMGALE
It's a living thing, Brian. It breathes, it eats, and it hates.

The fire's climbing a wall, chewing a corner.

RIMGALE
The only way to beat it is to think like it. To know that this flame will spread west across the floor not because of the physics of flammable liquid viscosity or heat convection, but because it wants to.

FWUMP. It darts west. Licks the ceiling. The fire purrs and hisses. Giggles and threatens. Stretches luxuriously and attacks savagely.

RIMGALE
I don't care why you came to work here, Brian. But to stay are you willing to take this animal home every night? To wake up every morning and wonder if maybe, deep down, you love it just a little too much?

Brian stares at the flame. A goblin reaching out for him...

--Woosh! Rimgale hits it with a fire extinguisher. In an instant the goblin is gone, the room silent and dead once more, the genie in the bottle.

RIMGALE
Every job has its piece of hell, Brian. But in this one you have to look down its face every day. You need to know that now.

INT. ARSON HQ - NIGHT

Rimgale's sedan backs up into the crumbling fire station he uses as an office.

UPSTAIRS

Brian climbs out of his sopped clothes. Rimgale's also there changing his shirt for a fresh one. As he takes it off Brian sees a horrible, scarred burn that covers Rimgale's entire belly and back.

INT. OFFICE

Rimgale is going through a chemical reference book. Brian, in clean clothes, stands looking at a framed picture on the wall. It's a burning tenement, hot and vicious.

BRIAN
Favorite fire?

RIMGALE
Personal one.

Brian once again catches a glimpse, just under the sleeve of Rimgale's shirt, the mutilation and wreckage beneath.

RIMGALE
(finding something in book)
Well, well...

BRIAN
What?

RIMGALE

The lab was right, trychticholorate is used in toxic waste accidents. But it has a few other quirks. Under extreme heat it consumes magnesium.

BRIAN

How does that matter?

RIMGALE

Magnesium is the one chemical you could sprinkle on a socket plug that would burn hot enough, 7000 degrees, to give your copper wires inside the melted characteristics of an electrical short --but it leaves a white powder trace that I'd see.

BRIAN

Unless you could find another chemical that would eat up both itself and the magnesium residue while the socket burned.

RIMGALE

Trychticholorate.

BRIAN

(smiles)

So that's why you're chief investigator.

RIMGALE

No, that's why I'm a legend.

Brian suddenly smells something. He sniffs, follows the smell back down the hall to another room. There stands Norman, the weird kid that hangs around Engine 17. At his feet is a small trash can he's duct taped a lid over. Small tendrils of smoke creep around its edges.

BRIAN

What the hell--

He walks over and RIPS off the lid.

--Instantly a tongue of flame SHOOTS straight up and BLOWS out.

BRIAN

You crazy little sick son of a bitch!

Brian grabs a nearby fire extinguisher and SPRAYS the can, which is already mostly out after the tongue of flame. Norman looks angelically innocent. Brian, furious, sets the extinguisher down and SHOVS Norman roughly.

BRIAN

You little fuck! What are you trying to do, burn the place down?

NORMAN
I---I was just---

Brian grabs him by the shirt collar.

RINGALE
Take it easy, Brian.

BRIAN
Do you know about this guy?

RINGALE
I caught him.
(to Norman)
I thought we had a deal about this, Norman.
No fires when I wasn't around.

NORMAN
I'm sorry, Mr. Ringale. I just---I wanted
to try it like on the board.

He points to the bulletin board crammed with info and pictures
from the backdraft fires. Ringale sighs, disappointed.

RINGALE
Go get a mop, Norman. Clean this up.

NORMAN
(meek)
Yes, Mr. Ringale.

As Norman walks out he pauses in the doorway.

NORMAN
He doesn't love the animal, you know.

RINGALE
What?

Norman looks hesitantly at Brian.

NORMAN
He's smart 'n all, your spark. He understands
the animal, knows how to make it love him.
But he was mean. He tricked it and took away
its gifts. He killed it.

Brian feels the hairs rise on the back of his neck.

BRIAN
Jesus Mary, what's the point of--
Ringale silences Brian with a wave of his hand.

RIMGALE

What do you mean, Norman, that he tricked the fire?

Norman puts on a creepy, boyish smile and leads Rimgale back to the bulletin board.

NORMAN

See? Look what it says. The burns were all lit in either double-annonized plugs or plugs surrounded by double fire-breaks in the walls.

BRIAN

Man, this kid's a regular Arson Annie.

NORMAN

He also made his burns backdrafts.

RIMGALE

But he started fires, Norman. He killed two people.

NORMAN

But he could have killed everybody, don't you see, Mr. Rimgale? He could have loved the animal, but instead he killed it. I mean gee, the fire-breaks kept it from spreading in the wall. The backdraft blew out the flame. He didn't light a fire, he put one out.

The words have impact with Rimgale.

RIMGALE

Thank you, Norman. Go on and get a mop.

Norman leaves.

BRIAN

Creepy little bastard.

RIMGALE

That creepy little bastard just gave us the reason.

BRIAN

What reason?

RIMGALE

Why backdrafts. Whoever torched those buildings and fried Seagrave and Benton went to ridiculous lengths to make sure they died by fire, but went to just as great a length to make sure the fire blew itself out and no one else got hurt.

BRIAN

And the duct tape you found on the door?

Rimgale walks over to Norman's trash can rips off the duct tape Norman had used to seal the lid.

RIMGALE

A backdraft was exactly what someone wanted.
So they sealed the door and set their own.

BRIAN

What does all this mean?

RIMGALE

It means whoever our friend is out there,
he's nuts enough to do it, but sane enough
not to love the animal. He knows exactly
what he's doing. Does that scare you?

BRIAN

Should it?

RIMGALE

It should give you fucking nightmares.

BRIAN

Then Swayzak finally has his mad arsonist.

RIMGALE

Not yet. I know now that he's out there,
but we can't go public yet and say we know
because Norman said so. We've got to
connect a few more dots first.

BRIAN

Swayzak's not going to like it.

RIMGALE

Our only duty is catching arsonists.
Try to keep that in mind.

EXT. ARSON HQ - NIGHT

Brian, finally finished for the day, walks out to his car. He gets in and turns the key.
Nothing.

BRIAN

Shit.

He gets out and pops the hood. His head tucked beneath it, he suddenly hears the faint, tinny notes of a Latin tune. He looks up. Parked nearby, sitting on the fender of her car, is Jennifer.

JENNIFER
Need a ride?

CUT TO:

The Latin tune from Jennifer's car becomes a live Latin band in an outdoor party. Beautiful people milling about against a beautiful Chicago skyline.

Jennifer leads Brian to a table full of dramatic women and their stylish dates.

JENNIFER
Everybody, this is Brian. Brian, this is everybody.

A deafening AIR HORN blows, and suddenly the skyline is MOVING. We're on a huge, private party boat.

CUT TO:

THE BAND

Is heating up and so are the drinks. Flaming tropical bowls that arrive blazing to the table. Jennifer looks her's over, daunted.

JENNIFER
I think this is more your specialty, Brian.

Brian picks up her drink and fearlessly plunges his mouth into it, coming up with a burning sugar cube in his teeth. He blows it out with a short puff and lays it on her tongue as she opens her mouth sexily. CHEERS from the others at the table.

MAN
Where'd you learn that?

BRIAN
Instinct.

The man, well dressed and about Brian's age, is sitting beside him.

MAN
I'm Will Judkins.
(they shake)
What business are you in, Brian?

BRIAN
Water relocation.

MAN
Really? Does your company have a municipal contract?

BRIAN
They scream, we deliver.

MAN
Lot of stress contracting with the city, huh?

BRIAN
You have to take a lot of heat sometimes.

MAN
Jennifer tells me you used to be in
direct sales stereo equipment. I think
it's a terrific concept. With the
right capital and marketing of course.
(hands Brian a card)
Give me a call sometime. I'd like to
talk to you about it. That is if you're
looking for a career change.

BRIAN
(turns to Jennifer, sotto)
Who is that?

JENNIFER
Willy? He runs his dad's venture capital --
outfit. They have a few dollars to throw at
this and that young turk.

BRIAN
What's a "few dollars".

JENNIFER
I don't know. Ten million maybe.

CL. TO:

The band's completely cut loose now. A wild percussion rhythm
that has everyone on their feet dancing like madmen. Brian and
Jennifer stomp and sweat and shake and giggle through hair
crazily askew. The lakeshore is twinkling and wonderful as it
slips past. The drums beat faster and harder and the only thing
that isn't moving now is their eyes---eyes locked on each other.

EXT. ARSON HQ - NIGHT

Sweaty, flushed with the evening and a few drinks, Brian and
Jennifer pull up in her car.

BRIAN
Thanks for the ride---and the evening.

JENNIFER
You don't happen to have a drink in there,
do you?

BRIAN

Well, this wouldn't be a real city of Chicago fire station if there weren't a alcohol on the premisis somewhere.

JENNIFER

Lead on.

INT. FIRE STATION

The regular engine company's gone to bed and the arson squad's packed in for the night, leaving the apparatus floor quiet and dim as Brian and Jennifer enter.

Brian leads her back past the engine and arson sedan to the rear where Rimgale has his offices. As they walk Jennifer's eyes drift up to the old sculpted parapets, the press-tin ceiling.

JENNIFER

Homey.

BRIAN

Yeah. This is one of the oldest fire stations in the city. Lot of tradition locked up in here.

JENNIFER

It's nice. In a testostetrone sort of way.

BRIAN

Well get a good look. Your boss'll probably have it shut-down by the end of the month.

JENNIFER

It's better cared for than I expected. Y'know, for a place guys just work.

BRIAN

It's a lifestyle. Nobody "just works" for the fire department.

JENNIFER

You do.

Zing.

BRIAN

These stations, they've always been more than just a workplace. People eat, sleep, spend a part of their lives here. It gets in the walls. It's like that with all firehouses, you should know that.

(then, at her expression)

You have been in firehouses before?

JENNIFER
Not really. Oh, a few of the new ones while they were under construction, and the time I came to see you.

BRIAN
Wait a minute, you're boss is the fire commissioner and you've never been in a working fire station?

JENNIFER
Enemy territory.

BRIAN
Lord help us...

JENNIFER
It's just another city building, Brian. I haven't seen the municipal power station either, but I know it's there.

Brian shakes his head and walks into

THE BACK ARSON OFFICES

He pokes through a few drawers, one or two shelves. Finally he lifts a squat, specialized fire extinguisher. The bottom has been hollowed out, leaving room for a fifth and two cups.

BRIAN
Old firehouse trick my dad told me about once.

JENNIFER
Your dad was quite a hero, wasn't he?

BRIAN
All dead firemen are heroes.

He pours two liberal glasses. Jennifer sips hers. Notices the bulletin board full of arson case info.

JENNIFER
What's this?

BRIAN
Evidence board. Our weapon in the eternal struggle for truth, justice, and playing with matches.

JENNIFER
How's our fire investigation going?

BRIAN
Officially? No comment.

JENNIFER
And unofficially?

BRIAN
We found chemical traces in the last one
and a maybe behavior pattern. Smart money's
on the big "A". Just can't prove it absolutely
yet.

JENNIFER
But you're pretty sure.

BRIAN
Oh yeah.

Jennifer takes a healthy draw from her cup and walks right past
Brian. Sort of. She brushes close in passing and breathes,

JENNIFER
So show me your fire engine.

OUT ON THE APPARATUS FLOOR

Brian escorts Jennifer along the side of the beamoth.

BRIAN
Well, our specimen here is your basic
standard issue piece of primary suppression
equipment. This area is the pumping panel,
which controls the rate of liquid insertion
into the hose.

JENNIFER
Uh huh.

Brian lifts a narrow, tapered straight-bore nozzle.

BRIAN
This is a six inch playpipe, cast bronze to
keep it firm during hard flows.
(picks up another item)
This is a hose ring used in forward lays.

Gulp.

BRIAN
This is our hard suction line...our
adjustable insertion nozzle...our forcible
rear entry pole...
(comes around back of trunk)
...And this is the hose bed.

Beat. The air cracks between them.
And is brushed aside.

In an instant they're all over each other. Tangled lips and gulping breaths. Jennifer abruptly breaks it off

--And looks mischievously up at the hose bed, with its long curling rolls of soft cotton.

Brian doesn't remember this precise scenario being discussed at the academy, but he improvises admirably, popping up onto the hose bed and offering a gentlemanly hand to Jennifer. As they tumble into the soft folds

CUT TO:

Another fire station, dark and quiet.

--The lights suddenly SNAP ON as the alarm klaxon HOWLS. Firemen come sleepily down the pole; Stephen, Adcox, Tim, Krizminski, Grindle and other laddermen. They yawn and shuffle for the rigs.

Except Tim. Jacked-up, he rushes for his coat, accidentally steps in a mop bucket and SPRAWLS flat-out on the cement.

KRIZMINSKI

Jesus Tim, if you're going to kill yourself at least wait till the fire, it's better P.R.

Embarrassed, Tim jumps to his feet and climbs aboard his truck as w

CUT TO:

Jennifer unbuttoning Brian's shirt.

JENNIFER

Tell me about the playpipe again...

She pulls the shirt off his shoulder as we

CUT TO:

Engine 17's crew as they pull up to an office high-rise, strap on their air tanks, and walk up to a frazzled security guard in the lobby.

STEPHEN

Where is it?

SECURITY GUARD

Don't know. There's alarms going off on three different floors.

STEPHEN

Wonderful.

They climb into the elevator. It's cramped on the way up with the bulky coats, helmets, hose rolls, and the tangible nervousness that always goes with this kind of fire. Mocking them, the elevator Musak plays a silly 101 Strings version of "Tie A Yellow Ribbon 'Round The Old Oak Tree".

TIM

How do we know if the floor's going to be on fire?

STEPHEN

If the doors open and it's hot, don't get out.

As Tim briefly reconsiders his career choice

CUT TO:

Brian pulling off Jennifer's stockings. As she kicks the last one away

CUT TO:

The elevator stopping. DING. The door opens. No howling blaze, not even any noise, but enough hanging smoke that you can't see you hand in front of your face.

They fan out gingerly onto the floor, looking for the fire. Hide and seek in a white fog bank. Everybody stops and listens. Slowly, carefully, they feel their way through the haze.

STEPHEN

It's here.

On cue something snakes past behind the walls, whispers and whines and shivers up and over them and then is silent. Leaving just the sucking in and out of the air tanks.

Krizminski attaches a hoseline to the building standpipe.

KRIZMINSKI

These fucking high-rise gigs give me the creeps.

ADCOX

Let's wait for a back-up, Stephen. We're early on this one, it hasn't even broke out yet. We're one short as it is with Brian gone.

But Stephen's on the hunt now. Obsessed.

STEPHEN

You want to wait for a back-up, Tim?

TIM

No sir!

They climb into the elevator. It's cramped on the way up with the bulky coats, helmets, hose rolls, and the tangible nervousness that always goes with this kind of fire. Mocking them, the elevator Musak plays a silly 101 Strings version of "Tie A Yellow Ribbon 'Round The Old Oak Tree".

TIM

How do we know if the floor's going to be on fire?

STEPHEN

If the doors open and it's hot, don't get out.

As Tim briefly reconsiders his career choice

CUT TO:

Brian pulling off Jennifer's stockings. As she kicks the last one away

CUT TO:

The elevator stopping. DING. The door opens. No howling blaze, not even any noise, but enough hanging smoke that you can't see you hand in front of your face.

They fan out gingerly onto the floor, looking for the fire. Hide and seek in a white fog bank. Everybody stops and listens. Slowly, carefully, they feel their way through the haze.

STEPHEN

It's here.

On cue something snakes past behind the walls, whispers and whines and shivers up and over them and then is silent. Leaving just the sucking in and out of the air tanks.

Krizminski attaches a hoseline to the building standpipe.

KRIZMINSKI

These fucking high-rise gigs give me the creeps.

ADCOX

Let's wait for a back-up, Stephen. We're early on this one, it hasn't even broke out yet. We're one short as it is with Brian gone.

But Stephen's on the hunt now. Obsessed.

STEPHEN

You want to wait for a back-up, Tim?

TIM

No sir!

Krizminski sighs and on in they go. Stephen and Tim take the lead, their axes gripped like shotguns. Krizminski backs them up with a charged hoseline.

STEPHEN

Adcox, take the ladder guys and check the other end.

ADCOX

Stephen, I should be in on this side, I--

STEPHEN

--Don't fucking argue with me, man, okay?

Adcox holds his ground a beat, then reluctantly takes his crew down the other way, patting Krizminski's helmet in passing for good luck.

Stephen and Tim slowly, carefully, feel their way.
CRACK

Everybody SPINS around in terror. Nothing.
Something inhuman giggles down ahead of them. Stephen smiles.

STEPHEN

(like a mantra)

Oh, you're so very sly, but so am I...

They come to a side door. Stephen runs his hand down the jam, feels for heat. Then he steps back, takes a deep breath, and CRASHES the door down with one AXE BLOW.
Quiet inside.

As they carefully work their way down the hall to the next door

CUT TO:

Brian and Jennifer into the rhythm now, breathing deeply. On the wall above them are framed photos of dead firemen. Watching. Optimistic, invincible smiles now sad and faded. As we see one of them is Brian's father

CUT TO:

Stephen runs his hand along another jam. Cold. WHAM -he crashes it down. Super fireman.
Tim's beside a door.

STEPHEN

That one's yours, Tim.

Stephen sticks his head cautiously into the room he just axed his way through.
Zip.

Instead of just prying the door with his axe like a normal human being, Tim backs up and decides to do it the macho way. Stephen's way. He readies his axe, gathers his courage as we

CUT TO:

Brian and Jennifer in a tight embrace, enjoying the moment, the lull, as suddenly the lights SNAP ON and an alarm klaxon BELLOWS. Firemen are coming down the pole now.

BRIAN

Jesus Christ...

JENNIFER

What's going on?

They frantically start climbing into their clothes. None of the firemen have noticed them as they climb aboard. They've STARTED THE ENGINE.

JENNIFER

What are they doing?

And before either of them realizes it, they're suddenly pulling out into the street and WAILING off down the block. The wind's wild in their hair, the siren deafening, the flashing red lights blinding sticatto,

And Jennifer loves it.

She kisses Brian fiercely, he lets out a war hoop lost in the blast of air, and together they hold each other as the night screams past and we

CUT TO:

Stephen comes out of the room he was checking. Sees Tim readying to axe the door.

STEPHEN

Did you check the door for heat, Tim?

Tim doesn't hear. He's already raising his axe.

STEPHEN

Tim?

Tim's committed now, coming hard at the door. And Stephen sees it for just an instant --Small tendrils of smoke edging lazily around the door --then being sucked back in.

STEPHEN

Tim!

He rushes for Tim as Tim's axe SMACKS the door and a whine behind it builds and roars and howls and Tim's all follow-through now, hitting the door with his shoulder as

The door EXPLODES OUTWARD, HURLING TIM against the opposite wall and for an instant he's okay but he freezes in terror as A SHRIEKING TONGUE OF FLAME SHOOTS OUT THE DOORWAY and

Krizminski shouts in horror and opens his hose line as the flames wrap Tim like a jealous lover as Adcox hears it and screams,

ADCOX

Oh God! Oh God no!

And Tim's screaming now too, because his helmet, his mask, his face, it's all melting and Krizminski dives suicidally at the monster, BLASTING it with his hose and Stephen ignores the flames and puts his arms around Tim as Krizminski DOUCES them both, killing the flames as The monster rolls wounded back into the room, into the air shafts a Tim whimpers incoherently, sliding down the wall as Stephen tries to help but oh God you can't tell what's face and what's mask and helmet anymore as Adcox rushes to Tim's side sobbing and It's the end, the end of the goddamn world as we

CUT TO:

The engine company from arson HQ pulling up to the high-rise fire. Firemen leap out of the cab and rush around behind to pull off lengths of hose from the bed. As the folds curl away the fireman is stunned to see a woman's stocking come out with it.

With equal shock he looks up and watches as a disheveled and grinning Brian and Jennifer climb calmly down out of the bed.

BRIAN

Excuse us.

Brian's time of his life grin suddenly chokes away as he sees a group of firemen rushing someone on a stretcher toward an ambulance. They pass right by and Brian sees---sweet Jesus---it's Tim. Paramedics load him into the van as Adcox and Krizminski jump in to ride along. To hold his hand.

Stephen watches the ambulance disappear out into the street. Frustration and fury tear at him as he takes off his coat and slams it to the ground. He kicks it, kicks it till his strength's gone. Then his eyes find Brian, but only for a moment of silent accusation, before he walks back toward the building.

UP IN THE HIGH-RISE

Rimgale rides the elevator and gets off on the fire floor, quiet now and dead. There's still smoke, like an indoor tulie fog, as he walks down the hall to the door that got Tim, lying now blown apart against the opposite wall.

Inside the doorway sits a CHARRED CORPSE. Leaning there against the wall, he seems almost resting. A haunted house decoration on a coffee break. A smoldering cigarette still dangles from its lips.

Through the drifting haze Rimgale sees Stephen crouched in the interior room, picking at the debris. Lost in himself.

RIMGALE

Hey, Stevie.

Stephen stands and looks around the room, seemingly unaware of Rimgale. Then he walks wordlessly straight out past him, his eyes streaming with tears.

Rimgale turns back to the inner door. Runs his finger along its edge and comes up with the same, sticky goo from the first one. Duct tape. He looks from the door to the corpse.

Three down.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Brian pulls up in his car and parks beside Engine 17.

INSIDE

Brian shoulders his way through the emergency room. He passes a small alcove full of vending machines. Adcox is there, sipping a paper cup, leaning against the machine in deep anguish.

BRIAN

Is he...

ADCOX

He's alive.

Further down the hall is ICU. Krizminski and Grindle are there, sitting outside the room, raw and weary. Some ladder men wander back and forth aimlessly. Tense.

Krizminski nods to Brian. Everyone's still stained and smudged from the fire. Everyone but Brian.

Brian looks through a door window into the the room. There, surrounded by doctors and physicians, lies Tim. He's been cut out of his uniform. Gauze bandages everywhere. As a pair of forceps peel some of them away from his face Brian glimpses what used to be a face, now only reds and browns and leaky whites.

He turns away.

BRIAN

Do they think he'll pull through?

KRIZMINSKI
They're not saying.

GRINDLE
Either way it's his last fire.

BRIAN
I should have been there.

KRIZMINSKI
None of us should have been there, Brian.

Voices rise down the hall. Turn to shouts. It's Adcox and Stephen, tearing heartbreakingly into one another. Brian can't make out the words but it's ugly, emotional. Abruptly it ends and Stephen emerges from the alcove, walking toward them upset. A loaded gun.

STEPHEN
You've got some nerve, being here.

BRIAN
He's my friend.

STEPHEN
A friend would have been there to save him.

BRIAN
And where was his captain, huh? Chasing down the big one again? Killing another fire bare-handed for Pop when he should have been looking out for his probie?

Stephen leans very close.

STEPHEN
This is a place for firemen.
(looks at Brian's clothes)
Not civilians. Go home and wait with the wives.

BRIAN
(beat)
What is the penalty for striking a superior officer?

STEPHEN
Nothing if it's self-defense.

Stephen roughly PUSHES Brian, knocking him against the wall. Brian comes off it with blood in his eye. He holds up, shivering with rage.

BRIAN
No. No goddamn it.

And he steals Stephen's fight by turning and leaving him standing there alone. Apart from his brother, from the men of his own company.

STEPHEN

Go ahead, Brian, walk away again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARSON HQ - MORNING

Brian sits at his desk, staring out at the middle distance. Rimgale enters and drops a newspaper in front of him. Front page City Side section: FIRE COMMISSIONER SAYS IT'S ARSON. The sub-heading below reads: Rash Of Fires Not Linked To Fire Dept. Staffing But "Mad Arsonist".

RIMGALE

Goes on about how break was made through the discovery of "chemical traces" and a "behavioral link". Oh, and it says the chief investigator is closing in on the torch and expects an arrest "any time".

Brian's eyes wince closed.
Rimgale sits down at his own desk.

RIMGALE

Want to talk about it?

BRIAN

I fucked up.

RIMGALE

Yeah. You did.

(beat)

I want you to pack up your desk, Brian. I don't know who you work for but it isn't me or this department. Go home.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Brian sits on the end of his bed, flicking back and forth in his hand the hinged fireman's spanner-wrench. A meaningless TV program blares behind him.

The door knocks. Jennifer sticks her head in.

JENNIFER

Hello...

She enters, looks at the blithering game show and Brian in his undershirt.

JENNIFER

Another exciting Friday night, huh?

She sits down beside him, locks an arm through his.

JENNIFER

Come Mr. McCaffrey, let me take you away from all this.

BRIAN

You told Swayzak about our arson lead.

JENNIFER

I didn't know it was a secret. There aren't supposed to be secrets between the fire commission and its investigators--

BRIAN

You knew what I told you wasn't ready for the papers. There isn't enough proof. They'll crucify Ringale when they find out. But who cares, your man'll be elected by then, right?

She unlocks her arm from his.

JENNIFER

Little speechy tonight, aren't we?

BRIAN

It was a shitty move, Jennifer.

JENNIFER

I was doing my job.

Brian grabs her and pushes her against the headboard.

BRIAN

And just how much of all this has been "doing your job"?

JENNIFER

You're getting insulting, Brian.

BRIAN

You used me.

JENNIFER

We used each other. You think I missed how your eyes flashed with love when you met the people who really grease this city? The way you'd practically come every time you got into that Jaguar parked outside. Don't lecture me about using, you've spent most of your life majoring in it.

He releases her. Stands.

BRIAN
You don't know me.

JENNIFER
Yeah? Why do you think we hired you in arson? Because you pulled a mannequin out of a fire? I was there, Brian, remember? I heard you and your brother. You two make a helluva team. One trying to kill himself to be his father and the other killing himself to be anything but him.

(beat)
Don't kid yourself, Brian. You knew what we were asking you to do. Don't suddenly pull out a conscience now. The fit isn't right.

BRIAN
What do you believe in, Jennifer?

JENNIFER
I believe in myself. And I believed in you, Brian. I thought you could go the distance. I still do.

She goes to the door. Hesitates.

JENNIFER
For the record, that night on the truck? My time card was punched out.

And she's gone.

INT. HIGH-RISE

Brian stands in the silent wreckage of the fire he wasn't there for. Looks at the twisted doorway that could have gotten him but instead got a friend.

INT. HOSPITAL

Brian stands alone on the threshold of Tim's room. Inside the young probie lies wrapped in tubes and gauze and years of wasted promise. An EKG beeps, a respirator hisses, and Brian gulps down something heavy in his throat.

EXT. ARSON HQ - MORNING

As Rimgale gets out of his car a limousine pulls up. Swayzak opens the rear door from inside.

SWAYZAK
Inspector.

RIMGALE
Commissioner.

SWAYZAK
Let's take a ride.

CUT TO:

The limo cruising through traffic. Swayzak is disheveled, unshaved, fidgety. A man who hasn't slept and had a few drinks before the one he's pouring now. He offers one to Rimgale.

RIMGALE
I usually have breakfast first.

Swayzak apparently doesn't.

RIMGALE
That was a cute stunt with the arson announcement.

SWAYZAK
Politics.

RIMGALE
Never my best subject.

SWAYZAK
When are you going to catch the prick that's doing this, Scott?

RIMGALE
"Scott"?

SWAYZAK
Don't you have any leads at all?

For the first time Rimgale sees real fear on Swayzak's face. And suddenly none of this is about politics.

RIMGALE
We still haven't found a connection between Seagrave and Benton. We don't even know the name of the last crisper in the high-rise.

SWAYZAK
His name's Jeffrey Holcomb.

That surprises Rimgale.
The limo stops back at arson HQ. They'd gone around the block. Rimgale opens the door, climbs out, lingers.

RIMGALE
Is there a connection between them, Commissioner?

SWAYZAK

Just catch the son of a bitch.

The door shuts and Swayzak roars away.

Rimgale walks back into his offices. He's surprised to see Brian there working at his desk.

RIMGALE

What are you doing here?

BRIAN

I want to catch the guy that burned Tim.
I want to go the distance with it. I'm
taking the shot, and you're going to let me.

Rimgale appraises his conviction a beat.

RIMGALE

Then let's get started.

INT. FIRE STATION 17

Krizminski comes up the stairs. Knocks on Stephen's office door.

KRIZMINSKI

Stevie? Inspection time, man.

STEPHEN

(from inside)

Have Rodriguez do it.

KRIZMINSKI

(surprised)

Yeah, but what about the--

STEPHEN

Just do it, damn it. Okay?

INSIDE

Stephen lies sprawled on his bunk, a deeply abused bourbon bottle on the desk beside him. His hands press down over his eyes as he weeps.

He's coming apart.

INT. ARSON HQ

Rimgale is on his computer.

RIMGALE

According to his county tax statement, Mr.
Holcomb was into property.

BRIAN

How big.

RIMGALE

He owned the building he died in.

(beat)

I wonder what else he owned...

INT. HALL OF RECORDS

A room so vast and packed with bulging racks of files it's an Escher drawing. Lost among its endless rows, Ringale and Brian sit crosslegged on the floor going through dog-eared book after book of property registrations.

RIMGALE

(reading from file)

Holcomb controlled his property through a shell company partnership. Now if we can just find the rest of the partnership...

BRIAN

Why don't they computerize this stuff?

RIMGALE

Vague, confused property listings are like cash, they'll never completely disappear because it's in too many people's interest that they don't.

CUT TO:

More files pulled and scattered across the floor. Brian's tie is off now, he sits on the floor surrounded by the flotsam of fast food, his eyes straining at endless paper trails that have begun to blur together. Then one doesn't.

BRIAN

Whoa, wait a minute...

RIMGALE

Got something?

Brian's arranging a series of papers in front of him, his brain struggling to hold it all together.

BRIAN

Holcomb's shell, Dorchester Trust, is owned by Pan Illinois which is majority controlled by Lakeside Investing which is a division of Windy City Properties; who's partners are Alan Seagrave, David Benton, Jeffrey Holcomb,

(beat)

And Martin Swayzak. --He knew the dead guys. He was investing in property with them. Two of the first buildings that burned were owned by Pan Illinois.

RIMGALE

The plot sickens, as it usually does.

BRIAN

So four guys get together, invest in some property. Someone starts burning their buildings, cooks three of the partner's faces off and Swayzak never says anything about it? Doesn't make any sense.

RIMGALE

Welcome to the Chicago Machine.

BRIAN

Be a lot of help if we could find out more about Swayzak's relationship to them.

RIMGALE

It would take someone close to Swayzak to do that.

And they both know who he means.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jennifer's waiting at a table when Brian enters. He sits down.

JENNIFER

I was surprised you called.

BRIAN

No you weren't.

She smiles and extends a hand.

JENNIFER

Friends?

CUT TO:

Brian and Jennifer in bed at her apartment. She gets up, walks to the window. A beautiful sea of lights cold on her body. A small, yellow glow rises up from the skyline miles away.

JENNIFER

There's a fire.

Brian's behind her with a blanket now. They watch in silence as the dull, quivering blob dances far away. Reaches for the night. A change passes over Jennifer's face.

JENNIFER

What is it you really want, Brian?

BRIAN

Swayzak knew the guys that were murdered. He owned a company with them. I want to know why he keeps that hidden.

JENNIFER

I don't know anything about it.

BRIAN

You could find out.

JENNIFER

This is all getting a little ugly.

BRIAN

Your boss is lying, Jennifer, and I want to know why.

She turns and looks at Brian with something like sadness, then slips on her long coat, picks up her clothes and walks to the door.

JENNIFER

I have to get up early...

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Helen's in bed. She stirs, hears something on the roof. Putting on a robe she looks out the dormer window. Stephen's there, sitting on the eave, lost in himself. He's been crying.

HELEN

Oh God, Stephen, what's happening?

She climbs onto the roof, sits down beside him.

HELEN

What's going on, Stephen?

STEPHEN

When I was a kid, what I liked most about this job was that there were no ifs. Everything was absolute. Life and death, right and wrong, you could hold it in your hand. But times change, I guess. Times fucking change. Now it's all running through my fingers...

HELEN

Come on inside, Stephen.

STEPHEN

No. There's something I have to do.

They linger an awkward beat.

HELEN

Stephen, when you work this out, come back and see your family through the front door.

He brushes her cheek lightly.

STEPHEN

I'm sorry I came, Helen, it's just...It's just there's nobody I can talk to...

The tears are running down his face now. Helen takes him in her arms and rocks him slowly, there on a small roof in a small neighborhood in land called Chicago...

INT. CITY HALL - MORNING

Jennifer comes down the hall and enters Swayzak's inner office. His chair's turned away toward the window.

JENNIFER

(holding print-out)

Latest polls came in, Marty.

(he doesn't answer)

Marty?

Finally the chair turns, revealing a haunted man. Polls are far from his mind.

JENNIFER

Jesus Christ, Marty, what's going on?

SWAYZAK

Leave me alone.

She sees a fire department file on the murders open on his desk.

JENNIFER

We've come a long way together, Marty.
 I've staked my whole career on you. You've
 got to level with me. Is there something
 you're not telling me about those deaths?

Swayzak's eyes are dead metal.

SWAYZAK

No.

And he turns his chair around again.

CUT TO:

Jennifer thinking, deciding.

--As She stands before a row of office filing cabinets.

EXT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Brian drives up and parks. He's half way to the staircase when he
 sees someone sitting in the dark in a car. He walks cautiously
 toward it.

BRIAN

Jennifer?

She hands him a manila envelope.

BRIAN

Did you have to--

JENNIFER

Just take it.

Silence.

BRIAN

I'm sorry.

JENNIFER

That's a dumb thing to say.

BRIAN

You're right.

She starts her car.

JENNIFER

Goodbye, Brian.

INT. ARSON HQ - NIGHT

Alone at his desk, Brian opens the thick legal envelope. Inside are two bounded reports: SURVEY OF PROPOSED CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING Drafts one and two. Stuck between the drafts is a page outlining costs in preparing the booklets; research, typing, etc.

Brian begins to wade through them as we

DISSOLVE TO:

Later and he's only half done. He stretches, gets up and walks over to the squat specialty fire extinguisher in the corner. Reaches up under it to pour himself a small drink. As he does his eyes drift over the extinguisher label; Instructions, list of active ingredients. One of them, buried down at the bottom,

Is Trychticholorate.

INT. FIREMAN'S PUB

Rimgale's waiting there in a corner booth as Brian arrives.

RIMGALE

So what's the big secret?

Brian lays out for him the draft reports on Fire Dept. Staffing.

RIMGALE

Should I ask how you got these?

BRIAN

In another life you'll thank me for not telling you.

RIMGALE

Have you been through them?

BRIAN

It's two different draft versions of the Fire Department manning surveys Swayzak had commissioned two years ago. The first reads like a flyer from the fireman's union: Give them more, not less. Apparently that wasn't what Swayzak was looking for, so he hired a consulting team to try again. They did the second draft, the one we all know and love, that called for station closings. This is the rough draft of their stats. Reading it you get the feeling they were making it up as they went along.

RIMGALE

And those consultants were?

BRIAN
Benton, Seagrave and Holcomb.

RIMGALE
That the Fire Commissioner just happened
to be in business with.

BRIAN
There's more.

Brian sets on the table a sealed beaker.

RIMGALE
What is that?

BRIAN
Trychticholorate.

RIMGALE
Where did you get it?

BRIAN
In a fire station.

Rimgale leans forward, all ears.

RIMGALE
Go on.

BRIAN
The lab was right. The only pure trych
that you can buy above the counter is from
DowCo.

RIMGALE
And all theirs was accounted for.

BRIAN
But what everyone forgot is that Trych is
sold everyday as part of a stable compound.
It's a minor ingredient in toxic foam
suppressant that's easily separated out
from the rest of the extinguisher compound.

RIMGALE
How do you know that?

BRIAN
It says so on the box.

Rimgale lets a long breath and rubs his eyes.

RIMGALÉ

Every fire engine in the city carries that.
Do you know what you're suggesting?

Brian isn't willing to say it.

RIMGALÉ

I think it's time we had a heart to heart
with Mr. Swayzak.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The red arson sedan pulls up to wealthy home. Rimgale and Brian walk up and knock on the door ---it creaks open ajar. They push the door open slowly. It's dark as they enter.

RIMGALÉ

Hello? Commissioner?

It's the HISS they hear first.
Then the FLASH of an electrical socket FLARING ice-cold cobalt blue. Suddenly the room's dimensions are there in frantic shadows. Chairs, a couch--

--And a crowbar that SMACKS the side of Rimgale's head. The light from the plug is a fierce strobe as the figure, a confused shadow, SWINGS at Brian and JUMPS him. They crash to the floor and STRUGGLE. The figure GRABS Brian's throat. Brian PUSHES him back

--Against the burning wall plug. The figure SHRIEKS in pain, SHOVES Brian aside and tries to run as Brian THROWS himself across the floor and TACKLES him. The figure CRASHES across a gas space heater, SNAPPING the connection off. The figure KICKS Brian, squirms free, and stumbles out the door.

Hissss...

Brian shakily climbs to his feet as fire eats at the wall. A baby backdraft wagging its tail. He goes to Rimgale's side, his face bloody. Lifting him by the armpits he drags Rimgale outside.

Hissss...

The ruptured space heater pumps gas furiously. Brian sees that. He also sees a bedroom door ajar on the far side of the house. And through the door a couch. And on the couch,

A body.

Hissss...

Brian rushes back inside. It's Swayzak, passed-out with a gin bottle. Brian drags him out onto the stoop beside Rimgale and hits the deck as the gas WHUMPS and the doors and windows EXPLODE in a HOWLING FIREBALL that WASHES OUT just over their heads.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL

Rimgale's sitting up in an emergency room bed, a nurse changing his head bandage as Brian looks in.

BRIAN
How ya feeling?

RIMGALE
Dumb.

(beat)
Thanks for pulling me out.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA

Still bruised and sooty, Brian sits across a table from Swayzak. The Commissioner's bleary-eyed, staring into his empty coffee cup.

BRIAN
Want to tell me about Benton, Seagrave,
and Holcomb?

SWAYZAK
They're dead.

BRIAN
They're also listed as outside consultants
in the the final draft of the fire dept.
staffing report.

SWAYZAK
(beat)
Someone's done their homework.

BRIAN
What did they do to the report?

SWAYZAK
I think you're a little junior for us
to be having this conversation, probie.

BRIAN
I'm all you got right now, man.

SWAYZAK
(beat)
Benton and the rest did do some outside
work on the report. So what? They knew
how to do staffing studies, they were
in business.

BRIAN
In business with you.

(beat)
It's funny how their names were never listed in any official versions of the report.

SWAYZAK
Some day, Mr. McCaffrey, you're going to have to tell me how you found that.

BRIAN
They cooked the figures, didn't they? Your "objective commission report" was just a snow job of bullshit stats. Nobody could really question it at the time, right? Hell, it came from the fire commission. Of course the fire commissioner just happened to be running for mayor, and like all good candidates he decided to cut the budget.

(beat)
You sliced the guts out of your own department, let guys get burned from undermanning, just to be mayor. Am I getting warm?

SWAYZAK
You're getting a pink slip as soon as I get out of here.

BRIAN
Fireman are dead because of you
It's then the blackness of Swayzak's soul peeks out his eyes with the banality of room temperature evil.

SWAYZAK
Fireman die every day in this world.
Brian SHOVES the table aside, GRABS Swayzak by the collar and SLAMS him up against the wall.

BRIAN
One of them was my father.
The two burn into each other, Brian finally releasing him and stepping back.

BRIAN
Who tried to kill you tonight?

SWAYZAK
I haven't the slightest idea.

BRIAN
Who'd want to kill you?

SWAYZAK
Well, that's sort of your job, isn't it?

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

Brian walks down the hall deep in thought. He stops suddenly. He's accidentally passed Tim's room. Tim's parents are the only ones seated by the door.

BRIAN
Excuse me, my name's Brian McCaffrey. I worked with Tim. I just wanted to say... hello.

MOTHER
Tim mentioned you. He liked you...

Her grief's a private one, wrapped thickly around her. The sound of the respirator coming through the door is painful.

BRIAN
If there's anything you need...

Brian turns to leave them in peace.

MOTHER
Young man--
(he stops)
If you could, we'd like to have Tim's things from his station locker.

BRIAN
Of course. I'd be happy to get them.

MOTHER
(beat)
Were you there when it happened?

BRIAN
(pain)
No ma'am, I wasn't.

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - SUNDOWN

Brian stands before Tim's fire station. His brother's and his.

UPSTAIRS LOCKER ROOM

Brian reverently takes Tim's things from the locker and places them in a bag. Adcox showers nearby.

ADCOX
(smiles)

Hey superman, what are you doing down here?

Distracted, Brian answers with a weak smile.

ADCOX
Pass me some shampoo, huh?

Brian reluctantly gets up and hands it to him.

ADCOX
And relax some, you're depressing me.

Adcox turns back to the shower head.

And Brian's universe caves in.

An icy claw tears out his stomach in shock. He stumbles backwards into a locker. Gulping breaths, he forces himself to look up at Adcox's back.

On it is a small, rectangular burn. It's fresh and it's the size of a wall socket.

Brian stumbles out of the locker room in panic.

ON THE APPARATUS FLOOR

Brian rushes past the rigs, hits the crash bar on the side door and spills

OUTSIDE

In the back of the station. He stops and leans against the wall of the practice fire tower. The sobs come in choking gulps. The rage as he pounds the wall over and over...

He calms, catches his breath, wipes his eyes and turns.

Stephen's standing there.

BRIAN
You want to talk about it, big brother?
You wanna fucking talk about it?

Their eyes lock a beat and now everybody knows everything.

STEPHEN
You don't understand what--

BRIAN

I saw Adcox's back! I saw the burn! I put it there! Jesus Christ, Stephen, he's been killing people!

(beat)

Have you?

(beat)

Answer me, goddamn it. Answer me!

STEPHEN

No!

Brian tries desperately to judge the truth in Stephen's words.

BRIAN

We gotta go to the cops, Stephen. To Ringale.

STEPHEN

Forget it.

BRIAN

What?

STEPHEN

Do you know what would happen if this got public? What Swayzak would be able to do to this department? To dad's department?

BRIAN

C'mon man, Adcox is a murderer.

STEPHEN

So's Swayzak. Same as if he pulled a trigger.

BRIAN

Adcox killed three of Swayzak's assistants!

STEPHEN

Swayzak's been killing firemen for two years!

It hangs and stings the air between them.

BRIAN

So what are you going to do?

Stephen's face clouds. He's being torn apart inside.

STEPHEN

Handle it.

BRIAN

Handle it how? Christ, man, he almost killed Tim.

That's like a knife in Stephen's gut. His voice drops to an unsteady, struggling whisper.

STEPHEN
I'm his captain. He's my responsibility.
I'll take care of it.

BRIAN
Don't do this alone, Stephen.

STEPHEN
It's my responsibility.

BRIAN
Let me help you. Let me--

STEPHEN
Stay out of it!

Stephen turns and walks back to the station, leaving Brian standing there, struggling with what to do. As he watches Stephen go through the back doorway, his eyes drift to a window just above it. There, watching him, watching the whole exchange between brothers, is Adcox.

An ALARM KLAXON bellows through the station. A garbled loudspeaker barks orders as firemen's boots squeak on the polished apparatus floor.

Adcox still stands at the window, looking at Brian. He finally disappears as Brian hears the cough of diesel engines.

BRIAN
Oh, Christ. Stephen...

He starts running for the station.

BRIAN
Stephen!

It's too late as the engine company pulls out and whistles down the street.

The ladder company is just easing onto the drive. Brian hesitates only an instant, then runs to the equipment racks, PULLS off the hooks his helmet, coat, boots --and jumps onto the truck as it takes off in pursuit.

ON THE ENGINE COMPANY

As it howls down the avenue, Adcox and Stephen sit side by side in the cab, staring at one another. You could cut the tension with a knife.

ON THE TRUCK COMPANY

The other laddermen look confused seeing Brian sitting among them.

A CAR

Suddenly CUTS the truck company off. The driver SLAMS the brakes, PUSHING the truck into a HORRIBLE SKID. The back fishtails, the wheels JUMP the curb, BASH a mailbox, and then the whole rig ROLLS onto its side and DRAGS to a stop.

It's tangled confusion in the cab's rear bench. Firemen, unhurt, piled atop one another. Brian slides his way out from under them, gets out of the cab, and looks down the street where plumes of smoke rise six blocks away.

He starts running.

EXT. FIRE - NIGHT

Flames and smoke curl from a huge industrial warehouse along the river as Brian, panting, runs up. He searches frantically through the maze of arriving engine companies, looking for number 17.

There it is but nobody's there. Brian stops a passing captain.

BRIAN

Where are they? Where's 17?

CAPTAIN

On the roof.

Brian looks up at the smoke and whirling firestorm of debris four stories above him, feels the bile of fear in his throat, the desperation,

--And begins strapping on an air tank.

CUT TO:

Brian, fully suited up, climbing the endless rungs of an extended aerial ladder.

EXT. BUILDING ROOF - NIGHT

Tongues of flame ROCKET skyward through ragged holes. Black clouds drift murderously, roofing tars bubble and hiss as the roof itself GROANS like a comatose dinosaur, reminding you the whole thing could go any minute --and you with it.

Trudging alone across this alien, spongy surface, Brian looks for his company. It's almost impossible to tell anyone apart, faces hidden behind helmets and masks become indistinguishable.

Finally he sees a lone fireman near the edge who's helmet has 17 on it.

BRIAN
(rushing up)
Stephen!

The face looks up. It's Adcox.

ADCOX
Brian.

Adcox cradles an axe. Near him, on his knees dazed and wounded, is Stephen.

BRIAN
Stephen--

STEPHEN
(foggy)
I'm okay, Bri...

Brian starts to move forward but Adcox steps between them. A hissing black cloud drifts through. They're the only three people on earth.

BRIAN
Why?

Adcox's eyes are clouded with tears.

ADCOX
Do you know what it's like to see a fireman die? To see a friend cooked so bad even his own mother wouldn't know him? When guys started getting hurt over a goddamn political election... It was like your father all over again.
(beat)
I did it for the department, man. For your dad.

BRIAN
Did you do it for Tim?

ADCOX
(deep pain)
That was an accident! Jesus Christ, why did your fucking brother have to go in there so early?

When Adcox turns again to Brian there's something suddenly dead in his eyes. Something that's been dead a long time.

BRIAN
We're his kids, Bob. Are you going to
kill us for his memory too?

Adcox steps forward. Brian backs away --to the roof edge. Sixty
feet up.

BRIAN
What's it going to be, Bob, huh? Two kids
for a memory?

Adcox steps closer.

ADCOX
We need to talk, Brian...

Brian suddenly RUSHES to one side. Adcox JUMPS him. They claw
frantically. Brian's helmet slips off and falls four stories to
the pavement.

ADCOX
Goodamn it, Brian!

BRIAN
NO!

Brian SLAMS him across the side of the face. PULLS him down while
ACROSS THE ROOF

The rest of the crews are totally oblivious to what's happening
through the smoke on the other side. Krizminski and Grindle feel
the roof go spongy beneath them.

KRIZMINSKI
Shit...It's going! Clear the roof! Now!

Everybody drops their equipment and runs for the edges as

BRIAN

Still struggling with Adcox, KNEES him in the stomach. Adcox
rolls over---and comes up with the axe.

The roof HOWLS and GROANS. Huge SPLITS race along it.

And then it goes.

The center section DROPS, and in rolling waves of SCREECHING
steel, the hole spreads outward; DEVOURING.

Adcox lets go of Brian and runs for his life as
The hole races for Brian, SWALLOWING roof as
Brian rushes to Stephen's side and drags him to his feet as
The hole catches up to them just as

Brian, with an arm around Stephen, LEAPS off the roof as A HOWLING FLAME BELLOWS UP as Brian and Stephen fall a half story before CRASHING onto an exterior fire escape. Brian pulls his brother to the deck as the fire WASHES over the edge of the roof and is gone.

There's no sign of Adcox.

BRIAN
You all right?

STEPHEN
Nice jump...

BRIAN
I'll try and find a ladder company.

Flames have cut off the fire escape two floors below, so Brian climbs down as far as possible, crawls onto a ledge, kicks out the window, and rolls back into the building.

INSIDE

It's a hard fall the five feet from the sill to the floor. Brian climbs to his knees. It's pitch black and he's lost his flashlight along with everything else. Unshouldering his air tank, he feels his way in the darkness.

The fire isn't in this area yet, but you can hear it trying; BANGING and SCREAMING at the loading doors, BOOMING and TWISTING in the ceiling.

Brian feels along the metal sides of tractors and dump trucks, looking for a door that isn't host-wired to hell. There's one to the right who's surface he touches gingerly. It's cold.

But there's a sound on the other side. A WHINE. Brian backs away as the door suddenly EXPLODES into fragments as Adcox BURSTS IN with a K-2 roof saw.

Brian scrambles away over a storage pallet as Adcox swings down with the K-2 and DISINTEGRATES it. He stumbles down between a row of tractors, sliding under one to hide in the darkness.

Adcox walks slowly down each aisle as Brian lies sucking concrete.

Then a loading door gives.
And the fire CRASHES into the room, LIGHTING it up in dancing yellow and revealing now, against the wall, a six foot shadow of Brian hiding under the tractor.

--The first SWING OF THE AXE SLICES the instep of Brian's turn-out boot. As he ROLLS AWAY the second hits a tire and BLOWS IT apart. Brian crawls out and snakes his way through some pallets.

WUMP --The gas tank of a tractor near the fire EXPLODES. Adcox walks calmly through the arcing glare, looking.

And there he is. Climbing a steel ladder to an overhead catwalk as--WUMP--another tractor EXPLODES, showering droplets of burning gasoline.

There's a door at the other end of the catwalk. Brian tries to open it. Locked. He throws his shoulder into it, tries to break it down--

As Adcox makes the top of the ladder.

The two engine mates stand there facing one another, the flickering light from below casting ghoulis shadows.

ADCOX

We just need to talk, Brian.

The roof above is GROANING in earnest, falling chunks of plaster BOUNCING off the catwalk. The place is coming apart.

BRIAN

No you son of a bitch! No!

Brian CHARGES and TACKLES him.

Adcox FLIPS Brian over, hanging him half off the catwalk. The whole building SHUDDERS and MOANS. Another tractor EXPLODES, HAMMERING the underside of the catwalk with shrapnel. Adcox nearly has Brian over the edge--

--Just as the catwalk support SNAPS and LISTS to one side. Both of them roll to the edge. Adcox grabs for the railing but comes up with only air. He SPILLS off the catwalk, catching a loose strut at the last instant. He hangs there a breath, too far to reach. The strut's red hot and burns Adcox's hand. He becomes suddenly calm. Looks at Brian with eyes that beg forgiveness.

Then he lets go and falls away into the flames below.

Brian crawls his way back up the shattered catwalk. On the still-level part near the locked door lies Adcox's axe. Brian picks it up and HAMMERS at the door. HAMMERS till it POPS OPEN. The catwalk GROANS for real. At the last moment before it tumbles away completely Brian steps through the doorway,

And falls.

Blackness and emptiness, two stories of it, before he CRASHES onto a landing. He's in a freight elevator shaft, writhing in agony.

Up above the fire POPS through the open doorway and starts slinking down the walls. Looking for him. Coming to take him. Milky sheets of smoke pump into the shaft and drift down like angel hair.

You're dead, McCaffrey.

EXT. BURNING FACTORY - NIGHT

A fireboat chugs it way up the river and stops alongside the factory. Crews rush to connect the massive stang nozzle, throw open the throttles, and begin pumping a massive, arcing stream at the building.

INSIDE

Debris is coming now. Chunks of flaming building falling thirty, fourty feet down the elevator shaft and BOUNCING off Brian's landing before falling another thirty feet further. Timbers, concrete, glass, it's raining harder and harder around him as the flames creep down the walls closer and closer.

He can't move and he's got nowhere to go and all of a sudden he realizes he's going to die.

The fire knows it too and savors the moment, takes its time. C'mon kid, be a pal and suffer some.

OUTSIDE

The fire boat increases the rate of stream, tens of thousands of gallons of water so powerful it scours the building's concrete sides.

INSIDE

In the main room where the catwalk collapsed, is Stephen, on his feet now and frantically searching for Brian.

IN THE FREIGHT SHAFT

The fire's almost on him and Brian's closed his eyes, waiting for the end.

When he hears the whoosh of air.

And suddenly now great SHEETS OF WATER are POURING through an upper doorway and CASCADING DOWN like monsoon rain.

OUTSIDE

We see it's the fireboat's stream. Millions upon millions of gallons.

IN THE FREIGHT SHAFT

The fire panics and retreats as the water COOLS its heels. Brian opens his mouth and lets the wonderful, beautiful rain fall over him.

It starts getting heavier.

And now it isn't rain anymore but a river. A TORRENT that is POUNDING Brian against the landing, HAMMERING him in brutal waves. He's losing his purchase.

And all at once he's SWEPT OFF the landing thirty feet down with a SPLASH into the pool of water gathering at the bottom of the elevator shaft. He thrashes madly in the swirling pond, trying not to drown.

The weight of his clothes is pulling him underwater. Struggling against the insane swirls and the sheets of water still POURING DOWN on top of him, Brian unhooks his fire coat and slides out of it. He leans back, tries to float on the rising column of water.

Ten feet above him a gas main suddenly SPLITS and IGNITES, shooting a WHITE-HOT jet of flame from one side of the shaft to the other.

He's floating okay, he's floating right up into the flames.

Brian tries to flatten himself out, to keep everything but his nose below water, but he's still moving up. And the heat's becoming so intense his face burns and he's ducking under water now, trying to stay alive, trying to decide whether to drown or burn--

--When there's a CRASH.

And suddenly another door on the shaft is tearing open. There's a glint of an axe. A flashlight.

It's Stephen.

Brian has about two seconds left. In that time Stephen sees the shut-off for the gas line mounted on the wall opposite. It's unreachable, a good twelve feet across a horizontal curtain of flame. Before we can even assimilate that,

Stephen's already jumped.

A crazy leap over the fire and against the opposite wall. He GRABS the gas line for support, reaches over, and HITS the shut-off. The fire instantly dies away. Stephen clings to the pipe, shouts down to his little brother.

STEPHEN

You're gonna be all right, Bri!

Suddenly the gas pipe backflows. There's a small pressure gurgle in the line an instant before it EXPLODES around Stephen, HURLING him with a sickening CRUNCH against the other wall. He falls like a rag doll into the water. Brian grabs him, fights to keep his unconscious face above water.

The level of the water has risen now to the point that it has begun to flow out horizontally through a large open gate beneath the doorway Stephen came through. It's like a sucking waterfall and it sounds as if the water is tumbling a great distance on the other side. Brian begins swimming furiously, his brother in one arm, to keep them from being drawn through the grate. But it's useless, the current's too strong. They inch closer and closer as

KRIZMINSKI AND GRINDLE

Appear in the doorway above them frantically holding out their arms.

KRIZMINSKI

Come on!

He can't reach it. It's not going to be close enough.

KRIZMINSKI AND GRINDLE

Come on!

At the last moment before disappearing through the grate, Brian JUMPS up and catches one hand into Krizminski's. It's an impossible hold. Stephen in one arm, Krizminski holding the other and Grindle holding Krizminski. They could all go in now. But Krizminski doesn't let go. His eyes bore into Brian's.

KRIZMINSKI

You go, we go.

Grindle gets a better hold, and now they're drawing Brian and Stephen up by their shoulders as the dying building COUGHS and HISSES around them...

INT AMBULANCE

Paramedics swarm over Stephen as the ambulance screams through the night. Brian's right there, holding his hand.

BRIAN

It's okay, Stephen. It's gonna be okay.

His brother's badly burned and battered. He squeezes Brian's hand, his eyes never leaving him.

PARAMEDIC

Oh shit, give him some adrenalin, man, now.
Now.

Stephen's EKG's begun to falter. The other paramedic fires off an injection into his IV.

PARAMEDIC

Jesus Christ, ringer's --two CC.

The EKG's become erratic. Stephen's eyes never leave Brian's.

BRIAN

Don't you die...Don't you die...

PARAMEDIC #2

He's going south...

They clamp a respirator over Stephen's face. The eyes never leave Brian's.

BRIAN

Goddamn it don't you die now...Not now!

They're breathing for him now. The EKG begins shrieking.

PARAMEDIC

Tac!

The paramedics begin scrambling to load the defibrulator pads on Stephen's chest. But the fireman's eyes never waver from Brian. They look into his with complete conviction, complete acceptance, And then they don't.

FADE TO BLACK

Then,

FADE UP TO:

EXT. MICHIGAN AVE - DAWN

A silent, quiet street absolutely empty of traffic. Then over the crest of Chicago's mightiest thoroughfare, creeps slowly a fire engine. It's emergency lights are on but not the siren. This engine isn't in a hurry today.

Behind comes another fire engine. And another. Ten, twenty, all of them creeping slowly along. And behind the engines now walk firemen in their dress blues. Hundreds of them. Walking silently in step behind

TWO COFFINS

Loaded in the rear of Engine 17. Grindle drives as Krizminski and Brian walk behind.

THE SILENT PROCESSION

Passes along the Lakeshore. Average people stop, take their hats off.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Two coffins, lying side by side and draped in the blue and white of the Chicago flag, await burial as a priest says the funeral mass. A single fire helmet rests atop each casket.

Brian stands at attention beside Helen and Stephen's son Sean, his eyes clouded with tears. The fire department honor guard folds the flag covering Stephen's casket and hands it to Helen, who holds it to her breast as we

DISSOLVE TO:

The funeral breaking up. A cascade of drifting blue uniforms. Krizminski and Grindle hug Stephen before going on to their own families. Their lives.

Brian stays behind, alone with the two coffins. Rimgale appears beside him, looking healthy but for the bandage still wrapped around his head.

RIMGALE
Your brother was a good man.

BRIAN
Yeah.

RIMGALE
Another couple of good men get burned up for their city.

BRIAN
Is that the way it's gonna read?

RIMGALE
Up to you.
(beat)
No one else knows.

BRIAN
Like it never happened...

Fitzgerald's walked up. He seems uncomfortable.

FITZGERALD
Fireman McCaffrey.

BRIAN
Chief.

FITZGERALD
I was told you lost your helmet on that fire.

BRIAN
I lost a lot of things.

FITZGERALD
I'd like to suggest a replacement.

Fitzgerald holds out his father's helmet. Brian holds it carefully, almost fearfully.

FITZGERALD
You've come a long way, Brian.

Brian looks at the helmet, runs his finger along the brim.
And puts it on.

RIMGALE

The fit's right.

And the three of them turn and walk away from the caskets;
rectangular spots of tan in a peaceful, green sea as we

FADE TO BLACK